A Bowl of Cherries

Memoirs of a Twentieth Century American

By
Wally Nelson

Wally Nelson - 2000

"All the world's a stage..." Long before these memoirs were conceived this author learned there is drama in every man's life that most never recognize. Of those who do, unfortunately, most fail to record their dramatic experience and more particularly, how they felt about what took place in their own lives. Had it not been for the encouragement of his daughter, this author would have been in the same group of unexpressed actors on the world stage. World War II and placing a man on the moon were two events that took place during this author's life that will forever affect the history of the world. He played minor roles in both. However, he believes that nothing could have affected his life more than the upbringing given to him by caring parents.

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2. Fun Years

Our new house included all the benefits of city life. Now we had indoor plumbing and electricity and used coal to heat the house. The house had a full basement divided into two parts. A walled off coal bin to the front of the basement is where the coal man emptied his truck using a chute that entered a small basement window next to the driveway. The door to the coal bin opened close to the door of the furnace making it easy to shovel coal into the furnace. In the wintertime the furnace served the dual purpose of heating the house and providing a continuous supply of hot water for cooking, washing dishes and bathing. The hot water tank stood close by the furnace.

We enjoyed the luxury of a bathtub in our new house. In the summertime a small wood-fired stove in the basement next to the furnace heated water for bathing. The person who took a bath first fired the stove to fill the hot water tank. Many an argument ensued between the party who fired the stove and others wanting to bathe because the person who took the first bath used all the hot water in the tank. I always looked forward to the summertime when I could go swimming in an abandoned stone quarry. There the water was warm, and I always took a bar of soap.

Heating water for laundry, we boiled dirty clothes in an oval tub that stood on a low two-burner gas stove in the basement. Christine often asked me to prepare for laundering by filling the tub with water, cutting up a bar of Fels Naptha soap into the water and lighting the burners. We kept a box of strike anywhere matches next to the stove.

Each person was responsible for getting his or her own clothes into the dirty clothes bin in the basement on schedule. Fortunately for those sleeping on the second floor, we had a clothes chute. We tossed dirty clothes into the chute through a small door on the wall in an upstairs bedroom and plunged into the dirty clothes bin in the basement. After boiling the clothes in the soapy water they were dumped into a washtub to be rinsed. Then we fed them through a wringer before being hung out to dry. The first wringer we had operated with a hand crank. As we became better off, we got an electrically powered washing machine with a powered wringer. The operator had to be careful not to get his or her fingers caught between the rollers. If that happened, hitting a large button on top of the wringer popped the rollers apart and shut off the power.

In the wintertime, the wet laundry hung on lines in the basement to dry and in the summertime it hung outside in the sunshine. Clothespins prevented the wind from blowing the laundry off the line into the dirt. The wet laundry was heavy and caused the lines to sag. To keep the clean wet laundry from dragging on the ground, we propped up the middle of the line with a pole. That was the way everybody on our street did the laundry.

Things got done a little differently with men's dress shirts. After washing and wringing, Christine dipped the collars and cuffs into starchy water before drying. Then after ironing, the collars and cuffs became stiff. We didn't have many dress shirts in our house because we were a blue-collar family and none of the men worked in a shirt and necktie.

Lake Michigan was four blocks away. Sometimes in the summer the temperature of the water got above seventy degrees making it comfortable for swimming. The zoo was close by and we spent many hours watching polar bears, seals and monkeys. On the fourth of July they shot fireworks out over the Lake from the zoo. Lakeview Park had a baseball diamond and a gym. The amenities seemed endless and it took me years to learn about them and many more years to appreciate them.

2044 Superior St.
Racine, Wisconsin

Most of all, I found many new playmates. Superior Street was a community of young families with children and Roosevelt School was only two blocks to the north. They put me in the second grade. St. Johns Catholic School and Trinity Lutheran were close by also. We were too poor to afford parochial school, but consistent with Christine's Danish heritage she enrolled us in the Lutheran Sunday School.

Pastor Eseman came to our house to baptize Nora who was born three months after the move. He was a stern, authoritarian who guarded his flock vigorously and demanded a pious respect for Jesus from everyone. Like Christine, he had false teeth. This caused him to smack and bite the plates into place at times but it never prevented delivery of a rousing sermon. I was in awe of him for a long time but eventually I sensed that he took a fancy to me. This became evident when he steered me into enrolling at Valparaiso University, a Lutheran university located in Valparaiso, Indiana. It was the only school to send a recruiter to visit me. I was overwhelmed by this attention.

When we moved into town Christine enrolled me in the second grade at Roosevelt Elementary two blocks north of home. I spent five years in elementary school before graduating to the seventh grade at Washington Junior High, four blocks to the south of our house. I completed secondary education at Horlick High located a mile west. Throughout these years I walked to school and back twice each day, coming home at noon for lunch. During the last three years my bicycle speeded these daily journeys.

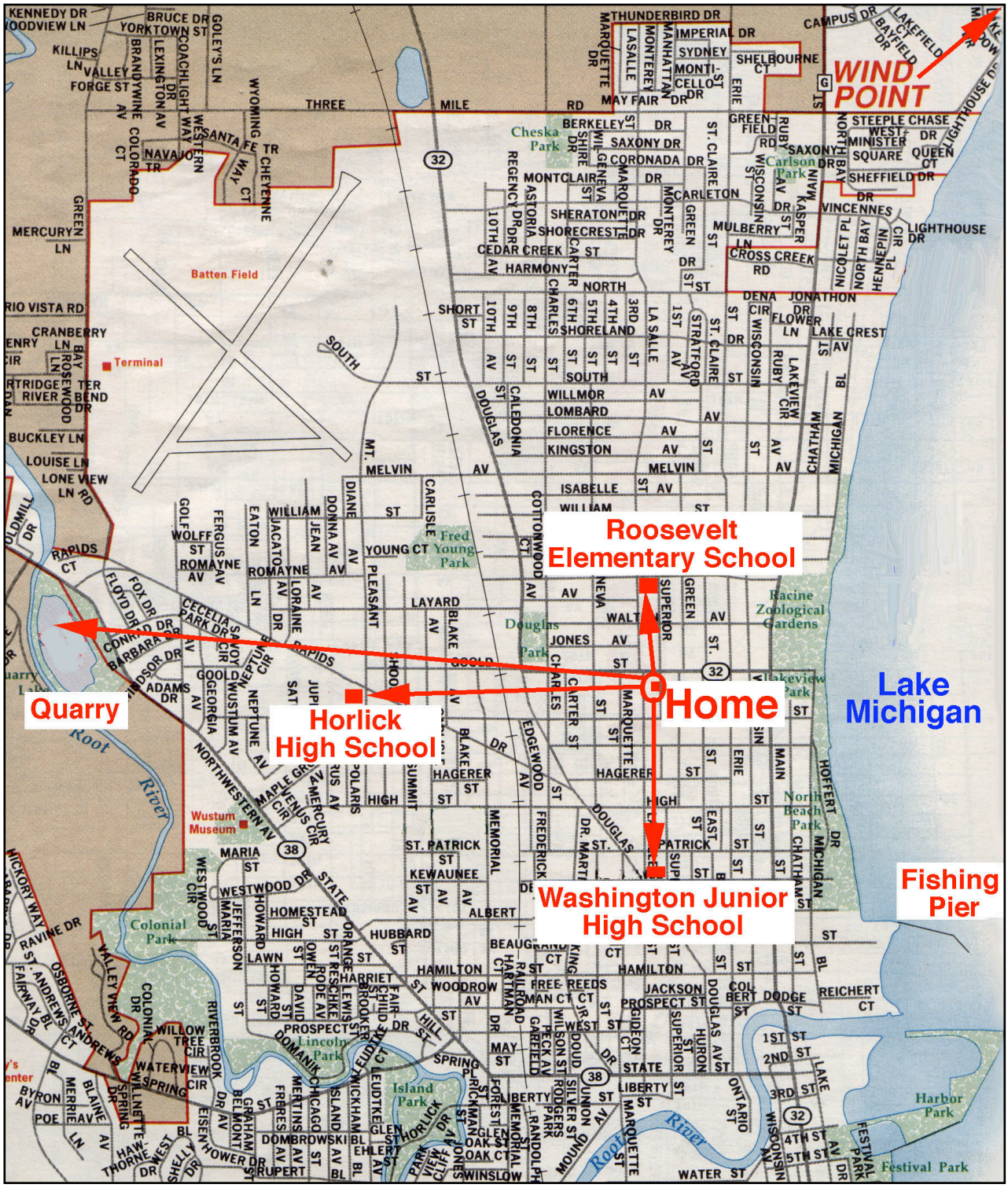
These most formative years seem to have been uneventful. At Roosevelt School I sat in a classroom with rows of flip top desks facing the teacher's desk in front. Each desk had an ink well in the upper right hand corner. The inkwells got filled from a quart-sized bottle with a small pouring spout. Cartoonists of the day depicted the setting with a boy at his desk dipping braids into his ink well of the girl sitting in front him.

I learned to write with a pen point inserted into one end of a six-inch wooden penholder. I could write one or two words before redipping the pen point into the ink well. Fountain pens and ballpoint pens were a thing of the future. We learned to write by copying capital and lower case letters printed in white on wide strips of black paper mounted to the wall over the blackboard.

Sitting in class one day the teacher asked three of us to write our names on the blackboard. I had stage fright in front of the class and it showed while I was writing. The class giggled at me. We sat down and the teacher asked the class which signature was best. Nobody picked mine except the teacher. Then she told the class mine was bold and readable from any place in the room. At dinner that day I told Christine what happened and she smiled without comment. (In those days we referred to our daily meals as breakfast, dinner and supper.)

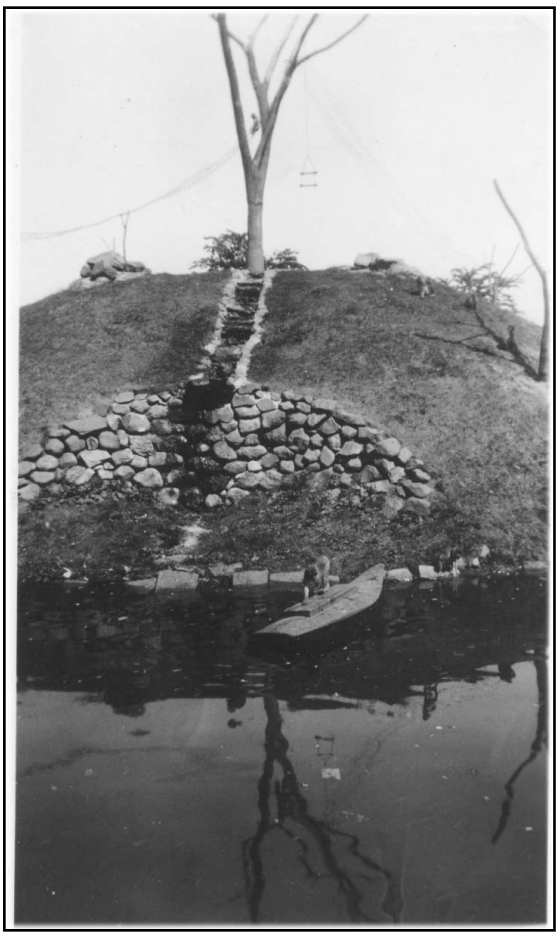
I had my first experience with the public health system at Roosevelt School. Doctors and nurses came to the school and vaccinated everyone for small pox and diphtheria. It happened in the hallway at the front entrance where long lines of children formed along with parents and screaming infants. It was also common in those days to quarantine homes where someone contracted measles or chicken pox. I don't remember ever contracting either of those diseases but our house got quarantined a number of times and I don't remember whom the family got sick. It might have been that those who were not sick also had to stay home from school until the quarantine sign came down.

Sometime during the five years I spent in elementary school, I became bedridden. They called it consumption, known today is as tuberculosis. I recovered nicely but it left a brand. Whenever I told my doctor in later years about that illness, he always prescribed a chest X-ray examination. Apparently all signs of the tuberculosis disappeared.



My world in Racine from age 7 to 18

While bedridden, the other students in my class wrote letters. The teachers hand carried them to me. They also brought Christine several bags of groceries because they were aware of our difficult financial straits. The early thirties were in the heart of the great depression and Olaf didn't have a job. Much of the food we ate came in bags marked NOT FOR SALE. That meant we were on relief. One time Olaf brought me a sheepskin lined coat and a pair of high top shoes. I knew he didn't have the money to pay for them.



Monkey Island - Racine Zoo
1930s

Being a carpenter, Olaf built a workbench in the basement. During the years he was out of work he spent many hours at his bench building furniture or maintaining and fixing the many things that go wrong with a building occupied by a crowd of overactive children. When he replaced the roof, I recall climbing the ladder to offer my help. That didn't go on for long because I wasn't strong enough to swing a hammer to bend over a fastener to hold a slate in place.

Often one of us boys cut our fingers while toying with Olaf's saws or chisels and then the bleeding began. Nobody heard of Band-Aids in those days, so Christine got the iodine bottle and fashioned a bandage by tearing or cutting a strip of cotton from an old sheet or pillowslip. We never had adhesive tape to hold it in place, so Olaf would take us to his workbench where he always kept a can of shellac. He poured shellac onto the bandage to soak and dry or he dipped the bandaged finger into the can. Brother Jack now laughs when he says that Johnson & Johnson stole Olaf's Band-Aid patent.

Sewing was one of Christine's many skills and she often made clothes rather than buy them. She passed this skill on to the girls. We had a foot-powered sewing machine that stood by the window in the dining room and it seemed to me that someone was using it constantly. The girls loved to sew because the clothes they made looked much better than the clothes they could afford to buy. In addition, Christine taught the girls to knit and crochet. They knitted sweaters and shawls and crocheted afghans and doilies. As they grew older they took to doing needlepoint and the pieces they made often got framed and hung on the wall. It seemed that almost every piece had a Danish flag on it somewhere.

While I was going to Roosevelt School, Christine decided I needed a warm jacket and she bought a pattern and the material and stitched it together on the sewing machine. I was proud of this warm gray jacket, wore it to school for the first time and lost it. It was a cool, sunny, spring day and I put the jacket on for the morning recess. Sitting on the playground in the sun, sheltered from the cold wind, I became warm and took the jacket off and sat on it. Then I became

involved in play with the other children and forgot the jacket. When recess was over my jacket was gone.

Naturally, Christine got upset. She asked the principal to help me get my jacket back. He in turn wrote a note that every teacher in the school read to their class. I never saw the jacket again. No wonder mothers get gray.

Most homes in Racine used natural gas for cooking, which Christine in her Danish accent called 'naturally gas.' We teased her by saying she was an ‘unusually person.’ Roper made our stove, which had four top burners and an oven. Olaf recessed it into one wall to provide more space in the overcrowded kitchen. It was where we ate all our meals except on special occasions when we gathered in the dining room. Even then, we ate in shifts because there were so many of us. The youngest ate last.

Olaf and Christine never kept liquor in the house except for the wine Olaf made and an occasional bottle of Mogen David sweet wine. However, at times it came into the house when we had a large gathering on Sunday and the adults had cocktails before dinner. We love to talk about the time they mischievously encouraged Christine to drink a martini and she almost dropped the turkey bringing it to the dining room table.

A sink hung off another wall in the kitchen and an icebox stood at the top of the stairs to the basement. When we forgot to empty the drip pan under the icebox, water trickled out onto the linoleum floor. Finally Olaf drilled a hole through the floor into the basement and funneled the ice water into the basement drain. A door next to the icebox opened into a pantry and another door on one end of the sink led to a half bath. A swinging door opened into the dining room and a short hall led to the front door and the upstairs.

We got our milk delivered by a truck from the North Side Dairy two or three times a week. The milkman left four or five quart bottles outside the back door. Some homes got their milk from the Progressive Dairy that delivered in horse drawn wagons. The clip clop of the horses could be heard early in the morning as the wagon drifted down the street. In the winter the milk often froze before we got up because we didn't have a milk chute built into the wall of the house at the back door. Then columns of frozen cream projected above the tops of the bottles and the round paper bottle cap sat on top of each column. We consumed gallons of milk and for being such good customers the Dairy gave us a small electric clock. It stood on a shelf over our kitchen table for as long as we lived in that house.

Farmers came by in horse drawn wagons hawked fresh fruit and vegetables on the street every day. Sweetman's drug store and an A&P store were close by. After we got an icebox the iceman gave us a card to post in a front window that notified him of how much ice we wanted. Depending on the posting, he carried 25, 50, 75, or 100 pounds of ice off his truck into the house hoisting it into the top of the icebox. While he did that, the kids on the block climbed onto the back of his truck and grabbed chips of ice that littered the truck bed. The iceman never objected to this because we were the children of his customers. Sometimes we ran out of ice before the iceman came. Then Christine sent us to the Slatkey's Ice House with a coaster wagon to bring home a block.

About once a month a man in a horse drawn wagon hawked the neighborhood for rags. He hollered, "Rags, Rags," as he turned his wagon into our street. Then people came out of their houses with old clothes and rags that they sold to him by the pound. He weighed the rags using a hand held scale with a hook dangling from one end.

We had a Spartan diet. In the summertime Olaf cultivated a garden that provided a variety of fresh vegetables. I also seem to recall that we had a chicken coop. After the head of a chicken

was chopped off, Christine dipped it in a pot of boiling water before plucking the feathers. Often we ate for dinner what we ate for breakfast - oatmeal. I got to hate the stuff. Arriving home from school for dinner one day I remarked, "Ma, this is for breakfast." Christine always laughed when telling that story.

Bread was the most important element of our diet, and it seemed to me that Christine baked it constantly. She often sent me to the A&P store for a 25-pound bag of Pillsbury's Best flour because that was the main ingredient. The process began by placing several pounds of flour in a large pan. Then she added the other ingredients and finally a cake of Red Star yeast, letting the mixture stand in the pan until the yeast caused the dough to rise. She kneaded the dough once or twice before cutting it into smaller portions that she placed in bread tins before baking. We dearly loved this bread. It was much better than store bought bread and was especially tasteful spread with butter immediately after coming out of the oven.

Pumpernickel was another kind of bread we often ate. It could only be bought at the Lincoln Bakery halfway across town and it was a favorite of Olaf because he had been raised on it in Denmark. We all learned to like it. Christine often sent one of us boys on our bicycle to the bakery to bring home several loaves. She told us to get day old bread if we could because it was cheaper. The crusts of the pumpernickel accumulated over time and Christine made a soup of them called ollebrod. None of us liked this concoction. Sometimes Christine flavored it with beer that made it taste even worse. We ate it anyway because throwing away edible food at our house was strictly forbidden. Flesk is Danish for salt pork. Christine prepared it in deference to Olaf but all us kids hated it. A bowl of bacon grease always stood on top the Roper stove for frying eggs and potatoes. Olaf spread it on pumpernickel but we kids always used butter.

Christine was an excellent cook and provided us with a good variety of Danish dishes. The meat included pork, ruskomsnusk, frekadeller, madiesta pils, and rabbit. Roast pork with mashed potatoes and gravy was the fare for Sunday dinner and ceremonial occasions. Ruskomsnusk is a one-meal dish like a stew that can include any kind of meat like chicken, pork or beef. Frekadeller is meatballs made with equal parts of ground pork, beef, and veal. We fought over the cold leftover frekadeller because it made delicious open face sandwiches when sliced and served on pumpernickel. We never ate hamburgers because we all liked frekadeller better. However, when we were old enough and had a nickel to spare we sometimes got a hamburger at a White Tower. Medister polse was Danish pork sausage. The seasonings made it different from other ethnic pork sausages. We also loved sliced rulle polse served on pumpernickel. It was thinly sliced cold cuts made from rolled lamb breast.

People still fished for perch from the breakwater that extended out into Lake Michigan at the mouth of the Harbor. Christine refused to clean or cook fish of any kind. She genuinely disliked the smell in the house. Fried perch was a popular dish in the local taverns every Friday night. Rabbits were what Brother Hank often hunted and he showed me how to skin and clean them. Then Christine prepared a delicious rabbit stew.

When Christine made chicken soup she often added boller. These were dumplings made with flour and seasonings. They were tasty and filling. Another soup was called gronkaalsuppe that was made with green kale and diced potatoes. Sagosuppe was a sweet soup made with tapioca and fruit cocktail. Rabarbergrod was another sweet soup but we all accepted it as dessert. It was made from chopped rhubarb, and if it wasn't thin, it became the filling for rhubarb pie.

Aebleskiver are a Danish substitute for pancakes and waffles. Made from a batter like pancakes and waffles, they are fried in a special cast iron pan consisting of eight to ten hemispheric cups. It is finger food eaten with jelly, jam, maple syrup or whatever suits a person's

taste. I haven't had any for years but sisters Effie and Mary have made a tradition of holding an aebleskiver party every year.

Three Danish desserts we dearly loved were citron fromage (prune pudding), abelkage (apple cake) and kringle. Christine only made citron fromage and abelkage for special occasions like a confirmation, Thanksgiving or Christmas. The pudding was always served with a creamy white egg sauce while the apple cake, prepared with apple sauce and crushed Holland Rusk and flavored with butter, sugar, and cinnamon, was made in a mold and served topped with whipped cream.

We bought kringle at the Lincoln Bakery. It is a large sugared pastry twist wrapped around a variety of fillings such as pecans, prunes or apricots. It is wonderful served with coffee for breakfast or as a dessert at any meal. One kringle might serve as many a twenty people. The Bakery also made a large variety of individual sweet rolls one of which was called fastelavnsboller. Like a croissant, it did not have a filling or frosting and was wonderful with coffee for breakfast. I have never lived anyplace where the available pastries could compare favorably with those made in Danish bakeries in Racine. I have often mail ordered a kringle to a friend as a gift and invariably it got rave reviews.

Kringle from O&H Bakery in Racine

When all we kids came home from school and gathered at the kitchen table for dinner, Christine insisted we pray before we ate. This was the only occasion in which she spoke to us in Danish, reciting the following prayer:

Translation:

In Jesus' name
We come to the table
To eat and drink
On your name
Thy God, to honor,
Us to gain
Then we get food
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

Often she designated one of us to recite the prayer and when it became brother Jack's turn he blurted out:

Amen a minute
Pass a potato and skin it
One's as good as ten
Pass the bread. Amen.

My search for this prayer continued for months and in the process I learned just how warmly responsive Racine Danes can be. I canvassed all the family members and other Danes I knew but none were able to provide a copy. Finally, I sent an e-mail message to the feature editor of the Racine Journal Times and asked for help. My message contained the following text:

"My name is Wally Nelson and I was raised in Racine by Danish immigrants Olaf and Christine. We lived at 2044 Superior St.

I am 76 years old, retired and am now writing my memoirs which I call A Bowl of Cherries, Memoirs of a Twentieth Century American.

While growing up, my mother often recited a table prayer in Danish that I would like to incorporate into Chapter 2. Unfortunately, none of us fifteen children ever learned to speak, read or write the Danish language.

With this brief introduction, may I ask you to contact someone at the Danish Brotherhood that will most likely be familiar with this prayer and have them send it to me written in Danish.

Phonetically, the first two words are: "Jesus noun..."

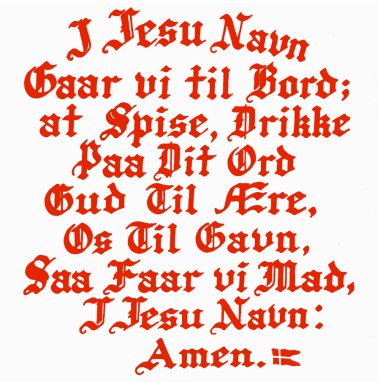
Alternatively, an e-mail contact for the Danish Brotherhood would be very helpful."

Two weeks elapsed and I heard nothing. In the meantime, sister Nora and her husband came to my house in Florida for a visit and we decided to call Denmark and request a copy of the prayer from a distant relative named Else Knudsen who lives in Copenhagen. As it turned out Else was familiar with the prayer, recited it at least twice during our conversation, and promised to put a copy in the mail.

The next day I began to receive telephone calls and e-mail messages from people in Racine who knew about the prayer. It so happened that the feature editor of the Racine Journal Times

gave my e-mail message to a reporter named Peggy Anderson, who printed it in her weekly column on Monday, February 7, 2000.

The response was heart warming. On the day Peggy's column appeared and on the following



day, I received three telephone calls from people who recited the prayer in Danish and promised to forward a copy in the mail. I also received seven e-mail messages containing copies of the prayer in both Danish and English. They were so eager to be helpful, noting differences in English and Danish spelling and explaining the phonetics. One person told me about his acquaintance with my older brother Vic. Two people told me that the prayer was printed on a plate that hung in their home. One 87-year-old gentleman, after sending an e-mail containing the prayer, called and sung it to me. He kept me on the telephone for a lengthy period while he told me his personal history. He also related his story about how this prayer had played a role in both his family life and church life.

During the following days I received thirteen letters containing the prayer with warm encouraging messages. Most shared their personal experience about the use of the prayer in their family life. I continued to receive letters weeks after Peggy Anderson published my request for help. I was so gratified with the people who responded that I wrote thank you notes and sent each party a copy of my book, Home On the Range.

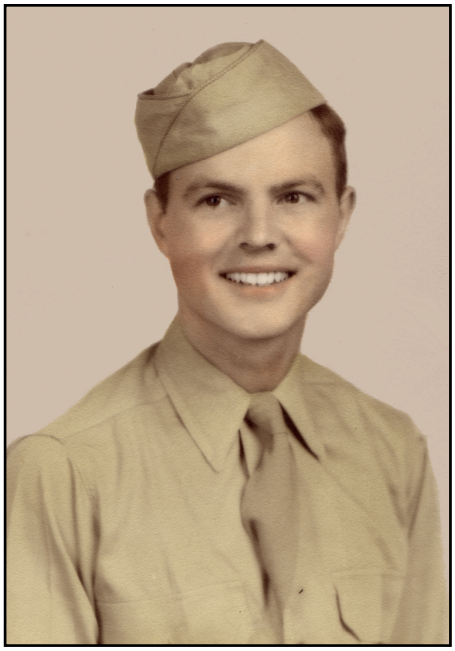
My first girlfriend, Carol Grau
1944

An enjoyable letter came from my first girlfriend, Carol Grau. Her heritage was not Danish and her letter did not include the prayer, but she had seen Peggy Anderson's article in the newspaper and decided to make contact. The envelope contained a photographic portrait of me that was made some time after my induction into the Army and before going overseas. I decided to telephone her to thank her for her attention and we reminisced for a long time. During the conversation she mentioned that her mother died four years ago and had lived to the ripe old age of 101. I extended my condolences and remarked that I alwaysthought her mother liked me. "Oh, no!" Carol remarked. "She reminded me all my life that you kept me out all night." With that we both laughed because we knew

both our lives were far more puritanical than her mother gave us credit for.

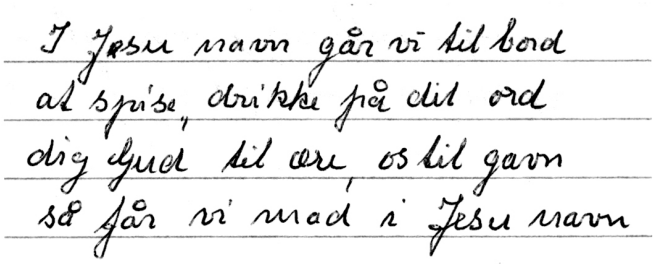
Lastly, the letter that Else promised arrived. It contained the prayer in her handwriting. I put the letter on my scanner and copied the prayer into my computer for duplication here.

Comparing it to the earlier copy, they are almost the same. Else's copy contains only the Danish letters while the earlier copy is anglicized using the double aa in certain of the words. Finally, the third line begins with the word "Dig." Of the many versions I received, the copy was evenly divided between those that used the word and those that didn't. Else's script is another characteristic of interest to me. The script of both Christine and Olaf and every other Dane whose handwritings I have seen all bear a remarkable resemblance.



Portrait from Carol Grau
1944

The way Danes wrote was not as much fun for us as the way they spoke. Danes have difficulty making the sounds associated with 'h', 'th' and 'v' and we mocked them about this incessantly. This, that, these, and those always came out 'dis', 'dat', 'deeze' and 'doze.' We never mocked Olaf but we teased Christine. Sister Nora loves the story of how I tried to teach Christine to pronounce the word 'veal.' Veal was the particular word I singled out for a lesson because Christine often sent me to the butcher shop to get chopped pork, beef and veal for frekkadeller. I stood close to her to demonstrate the drawing in of my lower lip for saying the 'v' sound. No matter how hard she tried she could not move her lower lip under the upper plate of her false teeth. No matter how slowly or often I demonstrated it, Christine could only respond by saying "wheel." Finally in frustration she said, "Oh, go sit down." Then we all laughed and returned to eating our oatmeal.


I Jesu navn går vi til bord
at spise, drikke på dit ord
dig Gud til ære, os til gavn
så får vi mad i Jesu navn

Ellie Knudsen's handwritten version of the Danish table prayer

When we became testy about our misdeeds, Christine recited the rule. "If you don't like the way we do 'tings,' go some place else." We never did. Brother Glenn, on the other hand, often made sport of the Danes' speech to his friends reciting, "Hey, Cwis (Chris), go get me a piece of wope (rope) and a piece of wia (wire)."

Peder Back broadcast a weekly radio program on WRJN in Danish to which Olaf and Christine listened longingly. One memory I have of his programs is that at some time during the broadcast he always sang the two words 'Sela cot' , 'Sela cot.' Olaf told me they meant 'fresh fish.' So I suppose it was a singing commercial. My favorite story about Peder Back concerns a commercial that he delivered. Keep In mind it took place at a time when service at a gas station meant that an attendant pumped the gas and cleaned the front and rear windows both inside and out. Sometime during every broadcast Peder announced with a strong Danish accent and in

broken English, "Go to Thompson's Gasoline Alley, they will wipe both your front and your rear."

During these years older sister Nina made her appearance. Until that time I only knew of her from a photograph that stood on the piano and stories that circulated among the other children. She had left home for Chicago before I can remember and became a nurse. She married and divorced a Chicago politician named Eddie Sturch. One Sunday she with her new husband Buddy Kramer drove to Racine. He got immediate attention by giving each of us younger children a one-dollar bill. That wealth was beyond our imaginings and we scooted off to a movie.

It would be simple here to digress and begin a new story about Nina and Buddy. He and his parents had emigrated from Russia. He never learned to read or write. He told me that as a child he rebelled in school and dropped out to run crap games in the Chicago schoolyards. Eventually, he became a professional boxer. Over the years he developed underworld connections. I once asked Buddy if he knew Al Capone, and he told me Al was a fair guy. Buddy also told me at one time that he had been a messenger for Frank Costello to the Chicago mob regarding a matter connected with the celebrity Joe E. Lewis. Buddy said he once turned down an opportunity to become the business manager for the janitors union in Chicago because, as he related it, he told the mob he had other plans. Nina and Buddy became successful operators of two different bars and restaurants in Chicago. Many years later they retired and lived in Racine where they both died. Throughout her life Nina maintained contact with the family. She adored Christine and I am confident she contributed heavily to the finances of the family as it struggled through the Depression.

While I was at Washington School I asked for the opportunity to work on a farm during summer vacation. Christine approached one of our former neighbors in North Cape with my proposal. Harry Hanson agreed to try me out and before long I started living at his house. One of my first tasks was to help Harry and his father harvest hay, which had already been cut and was lying in the field. I held the reins to the horses pulling the wagon while Harry and his father pitched the hay onto the wagon with pitchforks. The wagon was getting well loaded and I was standing high on top of the hay. Then Harry told me to turn the wagon left. As I tugged on the left rein I tumbled off the hay under the right front wheel. Harry saw what happened and grabbed my arm. He pulled me free as the steel rim of the wagon wheel pressed hard against my side. He and his father were greatly relieved that I didn't get crushed. The incident ended my ambitions to be a farmer but I still felt some attachment to the place of my birth.

I graduated from Roosevelt elementary school to Washington Junior High located five blocks south of our house. During the three years there I was confirmed. Pastor Eseman petitioned the principal of Washington School to have me excused from class to attend pre-confirmation classes at Trinity Lutheran Church. Classes at the church lasted for a number of weeks. After class at church I walked to Washington School to resume classes there for the day. True to her Danish culture, Christine invited all her Danish friends for a celebration dinner on confirmation Sunday. It was a big deal for me because I received gifts of money. It was more than I ever had before. My confirmation class posed for a picture in front of the altar in the church. Today it is difficult for me to recognize myself in the picture so I superimposed a frame to the copy. Aside from Pastor Eseman, I only remember three of the boys and none of the girls.

Brother Russ lived with and worked for Fritz Andrewson who owned the general store in North Cape. After I became the proud owner of a bicycle I told Christine that I wanted to visit Russ. She said I could and that I should peddle my bike along Highway K until I got there. Two hours later I arrived at Andrewson’s store in North Cape.

Trinity Lutheran Church Confirmation Class - April 2, 1938

A. Garza, Hazel MacIntosh, H. Myers, M. Monson, Harry Matterer, Helen Monson, Phillip Prudham
Donald Peterson, David Buckett, Kenneth Benton, Walter Nelson, Earl Klepel, Richard Hazelton
Eugene Doepping, Robert Gaulke, Lorraine Seyferth, Audrienne Gatzke, Gwendolyn Minton, Phyllis Roth, Mary Shelling
Ann Haase, Leone Muller, Reverend Eseman, Faith Emick, Carol Jameson

In front of the store was a single gas pump that stood about seven or eight feet high. A pump handle on one side pumped gas into a glass tank on the top. The tank held 10 gallons and a measuring stick on the inside indicated the amount of gas pumped into the tank. The buyer then used a hose to gravity feed the gasoline into his gas tank.

Inside the front entrance of Andrewson's store was an ice-cream counter with several tables and chairs standing nearby. The country store seemed to stock a bewildering array of merchandise including a variety of groceries, dry goods, clothing, hardware, sporting goods and ammunition. Every farmer needed shotgun shells for hunting rabbits and killing crows that attacked the chickens.

Most business in the store was done by telephone. The local farmers called in once every week or two. Brother Russ wrote orders standing at the counter holding the telephone receiver to

his ear with one hand and writing with the other hand. Between times he moved around the store gathering the items for each order, placing them in boxes and setting the boxes aside for delivery. Delivery took place once a week.

I road the delivery truck with Russ. He knew every dirt road and every long muddy driveway in the area. At each stop he verified the contents the order with each farmer's wife and exchanged gossip collected along his delivery route. Most farmers paid for groceries in part with eggs. Russ left the store with a load of groceries and returned with a load of eggs. He candled and repacked the eggs in new crates in the basement of the store. Then he carried them to a railroad stop for shipment to a wholesaler in Milwaukee.

I entered puberty during my years at Washington school. My first recollections about this are I went to ballroom dancing classes in the gym after school and that I attended a lecture for boys. They told us that if we were asked what was said during the lecture, we should say we attended a talk for boys. I suppose there were similar lectures for girls but I never asked. The substance of the lecture was that nocturnal emissions are normal. I can't recall if I understood what the lecturer was talking about. However, around that time my first emission took place and it wasn't during a dream. I was climbing a tree. After that, I learned whatever I could from street talk with all the other guys in the gang. My impression today is that they were as straight laced as I was because there was no talk about dates with girls until we were juniors and seniors in high school. Now I wonder if my life would have turned out differently had sex education been undertaken differently.

I graduated from the ninth grade at Washington School and enrolled at the William Horlick High School in 1939. Now they wanted us to become career conscious and required each student to choose a course of study. I chose an academic curriculum. The Year Book published at graduation indicated I wanted to become a dentist. That never happened but I did set my sights on going to college after graduation. As I mentioned earlier, my scholastic years seem uneventful. The things I did away from school are more memorable. I got a job delivering newspapers for the Milwaukee Journal that prevented participation in intramural sports and other after hours school activities. However, I always found time to mingle with the Superior Street Gang and other friends with whom I developed a fondness for classical music. That affection remained with me all of my life and I cherish the joy it has given. Composers became my heroes. I honestly believe that composers like Bach, Beethoven and Mozart wrote what they did because God talked to them.

It isn't clear when or how my fondness for classical music began. I did sing in the choir and I attempted to play the fluegel horn. Max Plavnick was the music teacher and the conductor of the Racine Junior Civic Symphony Orchestra. He encouraged me to buy an instrument and join the high school band. I bought the horn at a local music store on credit, paying fifty cents a week from the earnings on my newspaper route. I also took a few private lessons from Max. I showed up for a lesson one day with a split upper lip. It happened because of harsh weather and the cold, chafing wind off Lake Michigan. Raising the horn to my lips, I produced a double tone. The lesson couldn't continue and my lip didn't heal completely. In retrospect, I should have played a clarinet. In spite of the split lip, I doggedly tried to become a horn player. I joined the Johnson Wax marching band and they sent us to perform in various parades around the State. I tried to improve all through high school and even at the University. It was hopeless. Moreover, I really don't believe I ever had the talent.

However, I became fond of classical music. Brother Glenn, George Hlavka, Paul Dergarabedian and I shared this adventure. George played the trombone and Paul played the

timpani. They played in the Junior Civic Symphony and every week Glenn and I tagged along to the rehearsal. The city library had the scores for many of the symphonies the Orchestra played. We sat at rehearsal and followed the score as Max conducted. On Saturday afternoon we often got together to listen to the Metropolitan Opera. Glenn and I pooled our money to buy a record player. We checked 78 rpm discs from the library and bought others from the local music store.

Toscanini conducted the NBC Symphony during those years. We always listened to his radio program on Saturday night in season. We also looked for and listened to programs with John Barbaroli conducting the New York Philharmonic, Serge Koussevitsky with the Boston Symphony, and Leopold Stowkosky with the Philadelphia Symphony.

At one time during the War I visited Brother Glenn while he was a cadet at the Merchant Marine Academy on Long Island. Because of his proximity to Manhattan, Glenn found a way to attend rehearsals of the NBC Symphony. He took me to one of them conducted by Toscanini. We entered backstage where an offstage instrumentalist cautioned silence because Toscanini was temperamental about unnecessary noise during rehearsal.

The following table lists the names of all the boys who took part from time to time in the activities of the Superior Street gang.

The Superior Street Gang

Hank Barina	Bob Barina	Herbie Rahn
Wally Mundstuck	Bob Goebel	Matt Goebel
Grant Nelson	Jack Nelson	Wally Nelson*
Glenn Nelson	Joe Theisen	Ray Theisen
Don Pfeiffer	Jack McGrath	Bob McGrath
Roy Haase	Dick Haase	Louie Niebergall*
Don Dobereiner	Al Dobereiner	Bob Krueger
Wencil Kozenski	Tony Kozenski	Joe Kozenski
George Mohr	Louie Mohr	Gibby Gorski*
Dick Olander*	Bob Hovland*	Jack Gross*
Ray Felbob	Bill Dresen	Dick Walters
	Larry Zimprich	

*Bob Hoviland, Gibby Gorski, Dick Olander, and Jack Gross were killed in action during World War II. Louie Niebergall and I were captured by the Germans. He was a B-17 pilot. Both of us were liberated from Stalag VIIA in Moosberg, Germany. We didn't know of the other's presence while in prison.

Returning to the earlier years, when Olaf and Christine bought our house they bought a vacant lot on the north side of it. The Kozenski family lived in a red brick house directly across the street from our empty lot. They had a vacant lot on the south side of their house that was directly across the street from our house. Superior Street was a community of young families and

the area between these homes was the playground for the Gang. Brothers Grant, Glenn, and I became a part of it and brother Jack joined in, as he grew older.

Superior Street was a dirt street on which most of the kids were bare foot in the summertime. We played softball, football, kick the can and all other sorts of games kids devise. We sat on the grass in our vacant lot and played mumbly peg and a card game called Schafs Kopf. At night we met in the middle of the block under the streetlight. Then our mischievous side appeared. We organized raiding parties and swiped apples, pears, plums and grapes from the neighbors. We called ourselves the Superior Street Gang. It was not a formal organization. One street away was the Green Street Gang. There was competition between us but confrontations never took place and no one ever called the cops.

Brothers Glenn and Jack and I made many friendships with Gang members that have endured. Brother Grant courted trouble with some of the members and went his own way from the start. More than thirty boys made up the Gang. I list their names here for purposes of helping me recall what happened during the years we lived on Superior Street. A number of these guys lived a block or two away but joined in our play because they were close friends with those who did live on our block.

Someone stole my bike one day and the loss made it difficult for me to get to school or deliver my newspapers. After a number of days some of the Gang brought my bike back to me. Herbie Rahn saw my bike with someone at Douglas Park and the Gang took it away from him and brought it to me. I always felt indebted to Herbie from then on.

When we were about twelve years old we began playing a game of touch football every Thanksgiving Day at the Roosevelt School playground. In itself that habit didn't mean much, but the way in which it was carried out indicates an abiding close relationship among the members despite personal problems or the world's condition. We maintained the tradition throughout the War years with those who could make it. I doubt if anyone kept a log of all the times we met. Twelve of us met for the game in 1946. At that time, the Racine Journal Times wrote a story about us and published our picture. In 1987 we met again in the same schoolyard. In the 1987 group picture I'm the guy on the left in the front row and brother Jack is kneeling next to me.

The beach on Lake Michigan was about five blocks to the East of Superior Street. It stretched three miles north from downtown to Wind Point. A famous lighthouse sits on the Point that projects out into the Lake warning ships to steer clear. Another lighthouse stood on a reef built three miles off the beach opposite the entrance to the downtown harbor. Foghorns bellowed from both these lighthouses on foggy days. We heard the sound all over town.

We spent many hours swimming in the Lake and playing in the sand. In the summer the water was sometimes warm and sometimes it was chilly but mostly it was chilly. When the wind came off the Lake it brought in the warmer surface water. When it was off the land the water became chilly. The dress code at the beach for men required covering the chest. We broke the code frequently and especially at night when there were no patrols. A breakwater extended half a mile into the Lake from one side of the harbor. Sometimes we skinny-dipped off the end of it at night.

The Lake furnished a wealth of perch to fisherman who fished from the breakwater. Fried perch was a popular dish in the local taverns every Friday night. I tried fishing from the pier at times and wasn't very successful.

As the Gang grew into their teens our interest turned from activities on the Lake Michigan beach to golf and an abandoned quarry. By this time everyone had bicycles. Somehow we acquired motley collections of golf clubs. The shafts were hickory and often warped and no one

The Superior Street Gang - about 1931
Don Doebereiner, Don Pfeifer, Gibby Gorski, Bill Andreson , Matt Goebel, Jack McGrath.
Herb Rahn, Bob McGrath, Hank Barina , Lou Niebergall, Bob Goebel.
Joe Theisen. Grant Nelson, Wally Nelson.

The Superior Street Gang - about 1935
Tony Kozenski, Matt Goebel, Wencil Kozenski, xx? , Don Pfeiffer, Don Doebereiner
Bill Dresen, Ray Felbab, Bob Goebel, Herb Rahn , Hank Barina, Dick Olander, Gibby Gorski.
Lou Niebergall, Al Doeberiener, Jack Nelson, Buszie Barina, Bob Hovland.

had a complete set. We hunted for lost balls before we could play and they usually had cuts in the covers.

The City managed a nine-hole golf course located at Wind Point. The green fee was twenty cents and nobody in our Gang could afford to pay the fee. To avoid it we got up at 3:30 in the morning, slung our golf bags on our shoulders, and peddled our bicycles to the course. We waited for the first rays of light to appear over the Lake before teeing off. After we finished play we peddled our bikes back home and passed the pro on his way to work. We waved and he waved back. When I got home, I wanted to go back to bed but Christine wouldn't let me. She told me to get out and earn some money instead.

The Gang spent countless hours at a quarry located two miles west of Superior Street. We got there in fifteen minutes on our bicycles. At first the quarry consisted of two limestone pits. The small pit was on one side of Northwestern Avenue and a much larger deeper pit on the other side. The small pit was popular and used by both boys and girls. Very few people descended to the

Remnants of the Superior Street Gang gathered for Thanksgiving Day
football game in Roosevelt School yard- 1987

Top row

Dick Haase, Roy Haase, Bob McGrath, Larry Hjortness, Jack McGrath, Wencil Kosenski, Al Dobereiner, Tony Kosenski, Matt Goebel, Don Dobereiner, Don Pfeiffer

Bottom row

Wally Nelson, Jack Nelson, Ivan Hjortness, Bob Goebel, Dick Hazelton, Nibs Kosterman

water in the deeper pit. Gradually developers filled the smaller pit with dirt and sold the reclaimed land. Before this happened the attention of the Gang switched to the other side of the road.

In the deeper pit the water was crystal clear and we could see small fish swimming at great depths. The surface of the water was forty to fifty feet below the rim. Each year the water level rose a few more inches. Northwestern Avenue ran close along the east side of the rim. The Root River ran along the west side and an abandoned quarry house stood on the west side of the river. A steel conveyor frame projected out of the quarry house, across the river to a point at the top of the west rim. From there a steep rocky grade led down to the surface of the water. That was the entry point to our favorite swimming spot.

Access was a long, overgrown path leading off Northwestern Avenue between the River and the west rim. Most people did not feel comfortable walking or riding a bicycle along that path and very few people took advantage of the marvelous swimming hole to which it led. There were no lifeguards and no rules. Girls didn't go there. We skinny-dipped and sun bathed in the nude on

the rocks. The water became warm enough for swimming in April or May and unlike Lake Michigan it stayed warm throughout the summer.

We challenged each other to jump or dive off the wall into the water. The water was deep next to the wall and there was little danger of hitting the rocks. The height was the challenge. Somebody challenged me once and I jumped off. Not long after I tied a rock to the end of a string and dangled it over the edge until it reached the water. Then I measured the length of the string and it was thirty feet. I had met the challenge but I didn't think it was much fun and I never did it again.

The Gang undertook a project to build a raft that remained in the water for years to come. We got the material from the quarry house. We cut beams from the building and dragged them across the steel conveyor frame to the top of the quarry rim. From there they slid down the rocky grade to the water where we nailed them together. After that every part of the quarry below the water got explored. We spent as much time exploring under water as we did on the surface. Unexpected things appeared.

We found an abandoned safe in twenty feet of water close to the west wall. Apparently it was stolen, drilled open and then tossed off the rim. The door of the safe lay nearby. We could move the door but the body was too heavy to move.

One time one a friend found a body floating on the surface near where the safe lay. He summoned the police. After the police removed the body my friend returned for a swim the same day. He didn't want the experience to spoil his interest in swimming in his favorite swimming hole.

Christine and Olaf encouraged us to find ways to earn money at an early age. While I was in elementary school a representative of the Saturday Evening Post came to the schoolyard and enlisted students to sell the magazine. He gave me about a dozen magazines with a bag that I hung on my shoulder. Then he asked me to go door to door and sell. I can't remember if Christine approved but I suspect she would have. I don't remember if I was successful so probably I wasn't.

The dismal economic years of the Great Depression were coming to an end with the approaching war years. The bad news was that I came home from school one day and learned that Olaf had a heart attack. It was severe and he never again returned to work. I know it crushed his spirit because Christine told me after Olaf died that he felt he wasn't able to complete the raising of his family. Perhaps it was then that Brother Hank started to live at home. He replaced the income that Olaf would have had were it not for his heart attack.

Going back and forth to work each day at the Hamilton Beach Company, at the Hamilton Beach Company. Hank seemed sullen. He had little patience for the chatter of the younger children at the dinner table. Today we laugh at the expression he used that we remember most, "Shut up and eat!" Now I excuse his crabby attitude because he was just a little over twenty years old and the financial burden of supporting a large family fell on him. However, his financial input held the family together. When Christine worried that we didn't have money to buy coal to heat the house, Hank found a way to pay for it.

Eventually, the burden on Hank eased. Sisters Eva and Effie graduated from high school and found jobs across town at Webster Electric. They bought bicycles to get to work and brother Glenn and I often took them without asking. I suppose we felt their wrath for it but we did it anyway.

In a tragic way Brother Russ helped ease the financial stress that befell the family during the thirties. They drafted him as the war loomed and the Army sent him to a base in Washington State where he had a nervous collapse. Then the Army transferred him to the Great Lakes

Veterans Hospital. I was at Valparaiso University at the time and I recall visiting with him on one occasion. I don't believe he recognized me. Not long after, the Army notified the family that Russ had taken his own life. I can't help but feel it hastened the death of Olaf who died a year later after four other sons were called into service.

Russ was the first in the family to serve in the armed forces. Upon induction he claimed eligible family members as dependents because Olaf was unable to work. Consequently, Olaf and Christine received a check every month for the period that Russ served. Also, there must have been an insurance settlement after his death. In the longer term, however, because Russ had declared himself the breadwinner the family received social security payments. These continued until Christine died at the age of eighty-one.

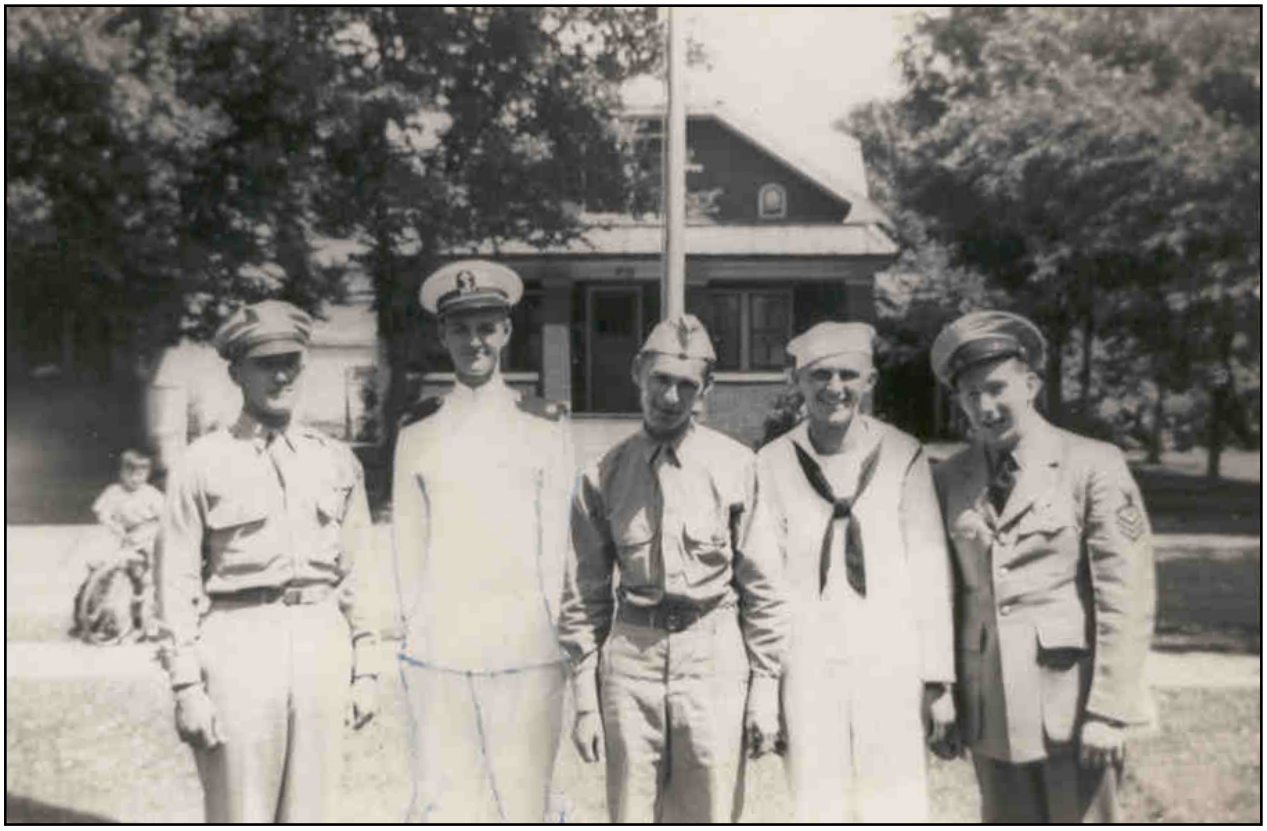
Superior Street gang golfers at Johnson Park
Glenn Nelson, Bob Goebel, Lou Niebergall, Lefty Olander, Hank Barina

Bob Goebel, left, and unidentified companion standing on the raft built from planks torn from the abandoned quarry house - about 1939

After entering high school I found a job delivering newspapers for the Milwaukee Journal. A daily newspaper sold for three cents of which I got one. The Sunday paper sold for ten cents of which I got three. I worked for the Journal until I graduated from high school. Henry Schroeder was the circulation manager in Racine and everyone called him 'Schroeder.' I became one of his favorite carriers. Brother Glenn also did well working for Schroeder.

When I first got this job, I needed a bicycle and I didn't have the money to buy one. Brother Hank was living at home at the time and he had a steady job in the local Hamilton Beach factory. I will always remember how, without my asking, he reached in his pocket and handed me twenty-five dollars. I bought the bike the same day. It served me well until I left for college.

Schroeder required all his carriers to canvass their routes for new customers. None of us liked to do this but that is the price we paid to keep our jobs. For some



Superior Street gang in service - July 1943
Gil Gorski, Matt Goebel, Hank Barina, Don Dobereiner, Red Krueger

reason I was more successful getting new customers than most of the other carriers. When the circulation manager from Milwaukee came to Racine he called a meeting of all the carriers and singled me out to tell the others why I was a successful canvasser. I told the group it was best to have a lady answer the door when I made a cold call. Then I gave her my biggest broadest smile and very respectfully called her "Mam" during my pitch.

I didn't always do things right. One time I threw a customer's newspaper on his roof. It happened as I peddled my bicycle past his house on Carlisle Avenue and launched the rolled newspaper toward the porch. It was a bad toss and the newspaper landed on the roof. I stopped my bike to figure out what to do next, but because I didn't have a spare copy to leave here I decided to finish my deliveries. Unknown to me the customer witnessed what happened and called Schroeder. I learned about my boo boo later at the meeting with a circulation manager from Milwaukee. He and Schroeder laughed as they described the incident and then told me what I should have done. I could have knocked on the door and borrowed a ladder to get the newspaper back.

Because I was a dependable carrier, Schroeder expanded my assignments. In those days it was not uncommon for a newspaper to print an extra edition for a special event like the 500-mile Indianapolis speed race. Copies of the extra edition came to Racine within hours following the race. Putting the papers in the basket on the front of my bike I peddled around town hollering, 'EXTRY EXTRY.' People came out of their houses to buy.

View of the gang's favorite swimming spot from the north rim of the quarry - about 1938

View of the gang's favorite swimming spot from the south rim of the quarry - about 1938

The Journal printed a market edition every day with the closing prices on the New York Exchange. The Interurban, an electric train with tracks in the street through downtown, brought a bundle of this late edition to the front of Hotel Racine every afternoon about six o'clock. I sold the papers in front of the Hotel, in the downtown restaurants, and I delivered copies all over the city. Along with my regular route these tasks consumed much of my time after school. I hated it in winter when I had to peddle my bicycle in the wet sloppy snow.

My final task for Schroeder was preparation of papers for Sunday delivery. Certain parts of the Sunday edition came to the Racine office all through the week. The front page and local news sections arrived at three AM on Sunday morning. I helped to stuff all the parts together before the carriers came to the office to pick up their copies for delivery. Schroeder paid me thirty cents an hour.

At this time, I decided to go to college and asked Schroeder to lend me three hundred dollars. He talked with Olaf and Christine about my request and then gave me the money. I had a special opportunity to express my appreciation for his generosity many years later while I was working as an engineer for the Aerospace Corporation in California. I learned he had retired to Los Angeles. I visited him and his wife Mousey and gave him an autographed copy of my book, Space Mechanics. I had co-authored it with Ernie Loft and it came off the press at the time I learned that Schroeder lived in Los Angeles. We reminisced for hours and I pleased him saying that his loan had helped me to become an author.

To my knowledge, none of the children in the family ever enjoyed the luxury of an allowance. We all earned whatever money we spent. From the time I started peddling newspapers, I paid for the clothes I wore and the repairs to my bicycle. Glenn and I bought a record player together and each of us bought whatever records we could afford. I was aware that the family could use room and board money from me after I graduated from high school and that I might be shunning a duty by going off to college instead. I shared my concern with Pastor Eseman and he strongly encouraged my going to school. During the months between graduation from high school and entering Valpo in September, I worked as a laborer in two different factories in town. Full time pay seemed like a lot of money to me compared to the part time work of selling newspapers.

In closing I want to reveal something of my reserved and awkward interest in girls. My recollection is that I dated very little in high school. During my last year I had a girl friend named Carol Grau, who I mentioned earlier. She was one year my junior, an honor student and musically talented. She had perfect pitch. We got along well and I thought both her parents liked me. After I left for college we corresponded and continued to correspond after I joined the Army and they shipped me overseas. However, after getting out of the Army and entering the University of Wisconsin, we just seemed to go our separate ways. In retrospect, I feel the war experience affected me emotionally and in some lasting way damaged my ability to develop close personal relationships.

3. World War II Years

I was well along in life before I could understand how much the characters of Olaf and Christine influenced its outcome.

Olaf and Christine wanted to be American citizens and both became naturalized. They loved their adopted country to the extent that Olaf erected a flagpole in the middle of the empty lot next to our house as shown below, and the American flag flew there every day. Yet, they clung to their old ways. A man was the breadwinner and a wife stayed home and raised the children. The children never talked back to their parents, their teacher or the preacher.

Being a traditionalist, Olaf advised his boys to join the Army and learn a trade. Six sons served in the Army, Navy and Merchant Marine during the World War II. At first, the service flag displayed in our front window had five stars and the collage on the following page had five faces. The sixth star was added to the service flag after Brother Jack entered the Merchant Marine following V-E Day. His face didn't get added to the collage until recently. I dubbed it in using my Macintosh computer.

Patriotic Christine
Sometime during World War II

Olaf's belief that his boys should join the Army and learn a trade led to the only heated argument I ever had with him. One evening before graduating from high school, I expressed my intention to go to college. Olaf took exception and I stubbornly told him I would go anyway. Christine listened without comment. I am confident she sided with me. Traditionally, she rarely disagreed openly with any of Olaf's decisions. Monetary help from the family was unavailable so I borrowed $300 from my boss at the MILWAUKEE JOURNAL. It helped to get me through the first year at Valparaiso University in Indiana. There I worked a part time job in the dormitory cafeteria and kitchen. Christine helped by doing the laundry that I mailed home from time to time.

It is ironic that my Army career did more for my financial well being in retirement than all of the retirement benefits that I earned from all of my post Army careers. It happened that I became a prisoner of war. Over fifty years later, the Veterans Administration awarded me a lifetime pension for medical disabilities attributed to the confinement. It happened this way.

The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941. At the time, I was seventeen and a senior in high school. On Monday after the bombing, we all assembled in the school gym to listen to the radio as President Roosevelt and Congress declared war. I didn't think a whole lot about it at the time. It didn't affect my schooling. I still delivered newspapers for the MILWAUKEE JOURNAL in Racine. It didn't affect my interest in girls and the up coming prom. I even went off to the Valparaiso University for a year.

Draft authorities agreed to allow male students at Valpo to complete the term if we enlisted. They also said that upon induction they would send us to meteorology school at the University of

Brothers who served in the Army, Navy or Merchant Marine during World War II
Top row - Wally, Jack, Glenn
Bottom row - Russ, Hank, Vic

Chicago. Therefore, I enlisted in the Army.

People were highly patriotic leading into World War II. A man not in the military felt inferior because he wasn't doing his part to win the war. Those of us who served didn't begrudge these guys who couldn't or didn't serve. We just envied their good luck for not having to. Many were physically unqualified to be in the military and many were holding positions vital to the production of war materials.

Privates Nelson & Rooke
on bivouac at Camp Roberts, California - 1943

Sadly, meteorology school never opened and I never learned why. Instead, on June 10, 1943, I reported for active duty at Camp Grant, Illinois. Getting off the bus at Camp Grant, they marched us directly to the commissary. A sergeant told us to take off all our clothes and put them in boxes that they mailed back to our families. We lined up at the beginning of a long isle lined with bins containing items to be issued. Single file we marched up to a non-commissioned officer who measured our waist by placing his hands on our hips to estimate the size. As each inductee passed by, he reached into one of the bins and handed him a pair of olive drab under drawers. We put them on and moved to the next station carrying the checklist of all the items to be issued. The first item on the list read, "1 belt, web, waist." There followed: underwear, socks, two pairs of high boy shoes, cotton khaki uniforms, wool olive drab uniforms and dress jacket, and a raincoat. They issued personal care items like comb, toothbrush and toothpaste. When we finished going through the line we had a full duffel bag and we were wearing the uniform of the day.

They escorted us into a room in a barracks lined on both sides with foot-lockers and over and under bunks. A low ranking non-commissioned officer demonstrated exactly how to make up our bunk. He wanted no questions. We followed his orders. He herded us to the barbershop where everyone got a crew cut. Then he marched us to the mess hall.

Over the next few days they gave us a physical examination, shots for tetanus and typhoid and we took the Army Generalized Classification Test. Nobody told us our grade. They assigned each man a service serial number. My number was, and will be for the rest of my life, 15109164.

We watched a movie about Army regulations. It convinced me I was nothing more than a number to the Army.

Everyone attended a movie about the perils of venereal disease. It was graphic and showed examples of sores on both men and women due to gonorrhea and syphilis. A medical officer lectured us following the movie. He told us the Army issued free condoms to all service personnel. We could stop in any prophylactic station to pick them up and stop by again for a preventive treatment after using them. After that, wherever we were stationed in the Army, movies and lectures about venereal disease followed.

Finally, I got on a train with my duffel bag along with several hundred other inductees. There were no sleepers on the train. We sat in chair cars the entire trip. Nobody told us where we were going. They sent us to Camp Roberts, California to an Infantry Replacement Training Center. Refer to Appendix III for my complete military itinerary.

We got our first short arm inspection as soon as we got off the train. They marched us into a barracks and a sergeant said, "All right! Skin it back and milk it down! Just like you did when you got caught in bed with her." Then the medical officer marched by. Those who failed the examination were sent to the hospital. They called short arm inspections frequently and without notice throughout our training cycle. We knew the inspection was coming when our squad leader announced, "All right! The uniform of the day is raincoats and GI shoes!" That meant that we disrobed and wore a raincoat only with shoes and no socks.

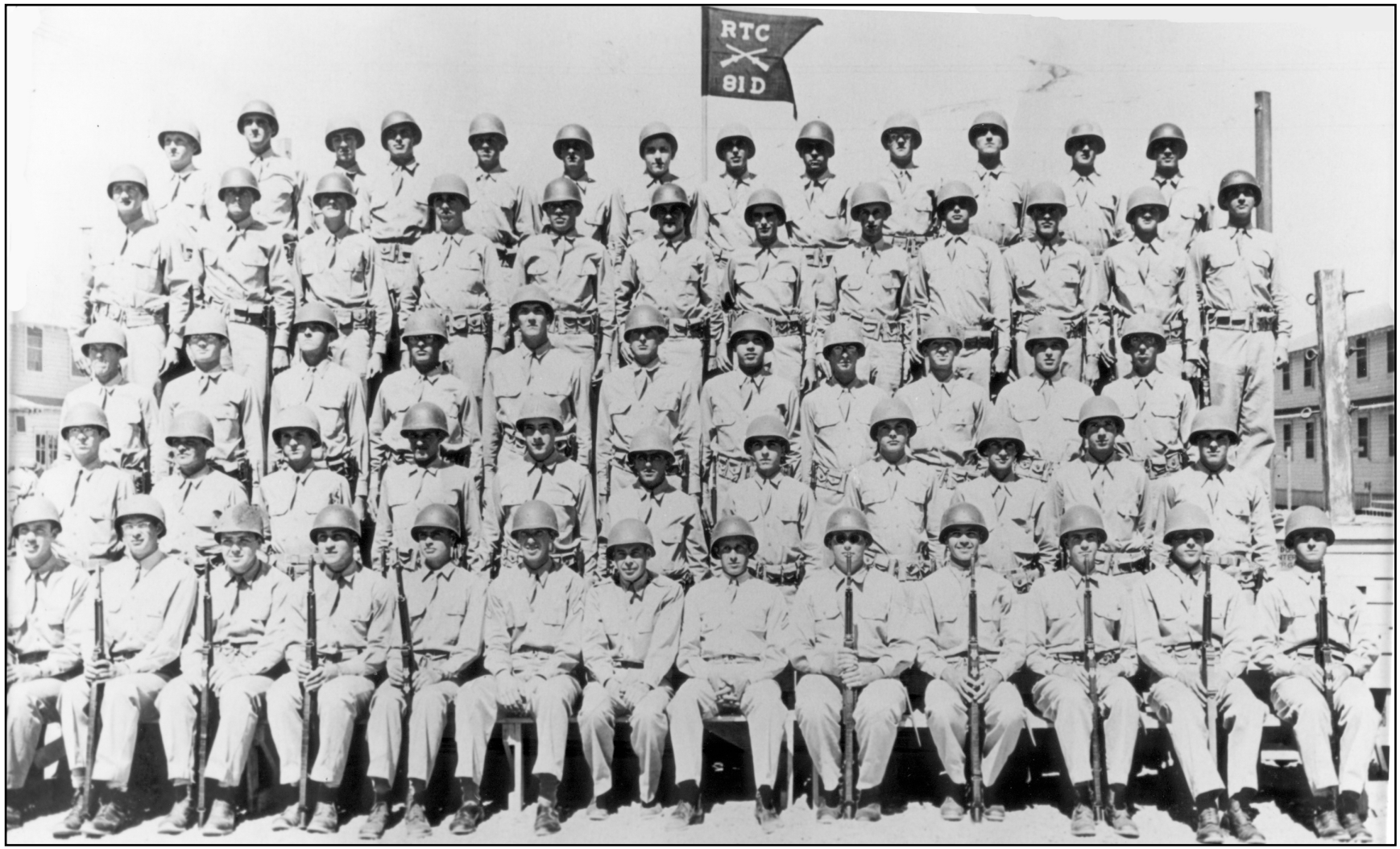
After short-arm inspection they herded us into barracks and assigned each man a bunk, a footlocker and a rack for hanging up our dress uniforms. Most of the time we wore fatigues. We settled into a busy routine immediately. Before dawn the platoon sergeant came out of his room, turned on the lights and snarled, "Drop your jocks and grab your socks!" As soon as we got out of bed we fetched buckets of water and moped the entire barracks. Then we fell into a formation where everyone was counted. Then they marched us to a parade ground for an hour of calisthenics and returned us to the barracks for breakfast. KPs put food on the tables in the mess hall family style. The troops showed no table manners and they were rowdy. "Pass the fucking butter," could be heard frequently.

I was in a battalion of men taken out of school. Most of the men in my Company came from Oklahoma A&M and Texas A&M. I got on well with everyone and they named me "Yank." I liked my new name.

One of the men I befriended was named Allen Rooke. At one point during training we occupied the same pup tent while on bivouac. Someone took a picture of us at that time but I have no recollection that it happened. We separated upon leaving Camp Roberts and I didn't hear anything of him until sixty years later (February 2004) when I happened to be in College Station, Texas where I lectured to the aerospace college about The Way to the Moon. Then I took the opportunity to visit the Former Student Center where I located Allen who was living in Vicksburg, Mississippi. and discovered that after leaving Camp Roberts he had become a combatant in the Pacific theater and subsequently rose to the rank of Brigadier General.

They were testy about their southern origin and openly racist. I quote from one of my letters to my sister Effie. "One southern fella' asked whether or not a colored officer had to be saluted, and when the lecturer (an officer) responded, 'Absolutely!' it seemed to be resented greatly...."

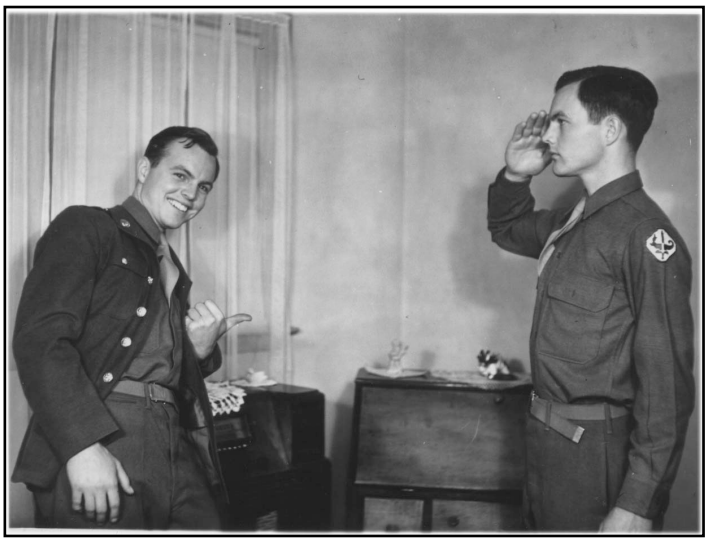
I learned quickly not to say or do anything that offended others. It happened one day that one of the men was taken to the shower and scrubbed using scrub brushes and GI soap. He didn't shower regularly. Those who slept nearby didn't like his body odor.



Reese McCharen Phillpot Oliver Richardson Picone Pratt McLain Perez Palmbach Owens Mortenson Olson
Matrewitz Nethery Ragsdill Metzke Sader Polk McKelvey Park McGeoch McGill Reither Maracheau
Patterson Norton Redman Melbers McDonald Nichols Robertson Martin Privett Marshall Maynard
Rose Lockwood Murphy Peck Rowland Peter Nathan Nelson Morrow Rosenberry Novak
Price Pugh Peskator Murray Rooke Cpl Thompson Lt. Lucas Cpl Nottingham Manuel Radley Ralourn Russell Parker

At a time during bayonet training, we were on break in the barracks. Somebody saw that the bayonet manufacturer etched the letters RIA into the blade of the bayonet and asked what the letters meant. Very quickly I answered, “Right in the ass!” Everyone laughed.

Most of the men in the battalion were identified for assignment to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) before arriving at Camp Roberts. While we were there tests were given and I was among those accepted for engineering school. We joked about our good fortune.



Private Nelson saluting himself - 1944

Take down your service flag mother
Your son’s in the ASTP
We won’t get hurt by our slide rules
So that Gold Star never need be.

The Air Corps may take all the glory
The Infantry’s got all the guts
But wait ‘til we tell you the story
How we sat this war out on our butts.

The story got around that our battalion performed better than other battalions that trained at Camp Roberts. The level of physical and scholastic achievement was relatively high. By the time we completed infantry basic training, our physical condition was superb. We hiked twenty miles carrying a full field pack and an M-1 rifle. No one fell by the way. Most of us earned medals as expert riflemen and machine gunners. I was an expert machine gunner and a sharpshooter with a rifle. They awarded a good conduct medal to everyone. We joked about it saying it indicated we hadn’t ever been sentenced to the guardhouse.

After we completed training, General Fales, the commanding officer at Camp Roberts, promised assignment to combat divisions. Such an announcement brought fear to most. It surprises me today, however, to learn from my letters to Effie that I took pride at being in the infantry. I even wanted to become a paratrooper. I continued to express this feeling until I actually had the opportunity the following year.

Upon completing basic training some of us were assigned to Loyola University. Loyola was a small Jesuit school located in the Englewood section of Los Angeles. We all lived in a dormitory on the campus in the same building as our classrooms. Not long after matriculation our commanding officer ordered us to attend a sex lecture. The Chancellor of the school, a priest, spoke first and introduced a medical officer. He began by telling us of his dismay for the necessity of the lecture. Just that morning while in his office, a student GI walked by his window singing, “I got the gonorrhea. I got it from Maria.” With that the auditorium burst into laughter.

We didn't intend disrespect for the Chancellor. It was the contrast between his moral expectations of us and our routine acceptance of the Army's method for preventive medicine.

While at Loyola, Olaf died. I am confident his wish that I seek a trade in the Army did not include combat duty. He was spared the notice that I was missing in action in Italy. My commanding officer gave me leave to attend the funeral. While in Racine for the funeral my good buddy George Hlavka took a trick photograph of me saluting myself. The shoulder patch was the insignia for those in the ASTP.

I missed almost a month of the first semester and when I returned to duty they told me I would have to start all over. I successfully pleaded with my instructors to give me a passing grade for the work I had completed.

Unfortunately, my time in the ASTP lasted only a semester and a half and then they sent all of us back to the infantry. D-day was coming and there was a desperate need for large numbers of infantry to spearhead the Normandy invasion of Europe. However, I didn't go directly to a port of embarkation. They assigned me to the 89th Light Infantry Division at the Hunter Liggett Military Reservation in a mountainous part of California.

I became an unhappy camper after getting to Hunter Liggett. Life there began in ten man pyramidal tents. From there we went on maneuvers where we slept in two pup tents. My platoon sergeant took an immediate dislike of me. He walked up to me one day while I was on my own time and ordered me not to read a book of Shakespeare I carried. Today, I can't remember his name, but I recall he had a Louisiana Cajun background.

On Easter morning, 1944, I woke up to the sound of machine gun fire. The Division was engaged in mock combat. It wasn't long after that I contracted a severe case of poison oak on my ass. They put me in a mobile field hospital for the duration of maneuvers. Others were afflicted on every conceivable part of their bodies. It closed the eyes of a Chinese soldier and the blisters wept continuously with the poisonous fluid created by the oak. Another soldier contracted the poison oak on his penis. It swelled to the size of a large banana and he continuously patted it with calamine lotion to relieve the intense itching. When the maneuvers were over, they sent all of us for recovery to the hospital at Camp Roberts.

By the end of May 1944, the Division moved by rail to Camp Butner, North Carolina. Camp Butner was the staging area for duty in Europe. Now time hung heavy on me. All duty seemed pointless. I wanted to get away from the drudgery. When they asked for volunteers to go to paratrooper school at Fort Benning, I applied. Soon I was at Fort Benning where they rejected me before my training could begin. I had worn glasses since I was eight years old. They made me take them off before the test. I failed. They gave me a furlough and when it was over I reported back to Fort Meade, Maryland. Fort Meade was the last stop before the port of embarkation. A map of my overseas itinerary is provided in Appendix III.

I embarked from Newport News, Virginia, on a Liberty Ship in October 1944. While boarding the ship I felt very lonely. Red Cross ladies distributed care packages at the docks that included cartons of cigarettes and a New Testament. Nothing they did could make the loneliness go away. They wouldn't tell us where we were going or when we would get there. I wanted to be home where I could see my girl friend every day. I spent the next fifteen days crossing the Atlantic. My living space was a canvas bunk, the length and width of my body and the height of my forearm. These bunks were stacked five high throughout the perimeter of the hold. In the center of the hold were high tables at which we stood to eat. There were hundreds of us of in that ship. The bread we ate got moldy before we landed at Oran in North Africa.

In rest and rehabilitation
Florence, Italy, February 1945

In rest and rehabilitation
with Joe Kormanski from Philadelphia
Florence, Italy, February 1945

There we boarded a large English troop carrier that took us to Naples where we boarded still another troop ship that took us to Leghorn on the western shore of Italy, north of Rome. Then they put us on trucks and took us to an infantry replacement depot near the front lines in the Apennine Mountains. We called it a "repple depple." It was cold and rainy. We lived in tents. There were thousands of us and nobody had time to develop friendships. Assignment to units on the front lines came within days.

I was assigned to the 3rd platoon, Co. I, 133rd Regiment, 34th Division. Our platoon leader was Lt. Sylvester Decker. A platoon sergeant pointed at me and said, "You are second scout." Understand what "scout" means. "Scouts out! Bang! Bang! Two more scouts out." My recollection is that the 34th Division had two periods of front line duty while I was assigned to it. My correspondence to Effie did not say when these periods took place. Army regulations prohibited writing anything that disclosed information about troop movements. They censored all our letters. However, a letter written December 1, 1944, revealed that I had regained a sense of humor. I wrote:

My mother gave me a horn so I can toot
Uncle Sam gave me a gun so I can shoot
Now I can toot and shoot
Ain't that cute?

The Division occupied defensive positions during the winter of 1944. While on the front we exchanged artillery, rocket, mortar and machine gun fire with the Germans. There were no fire-fights or hand-to-hand combat. At night I was sent out on contact patrols. The first close contact with the enemy took place the night I was captured. It taught me that combat infantry duty consists of long periods of miserable boredom punctuated with moments of sheer terror.

On my first trip to the front lines we rode a truck at night to a place where the mud on the road was knee deep. From there we continued on foot. The hike that followed made an everlasting impression on me. Walking through the knee deep mud was so difficult that several men fell by the wayside in tears. A dead body lay alongside of the road. I couldn't tell if it was American or German.

The Army illuminated the sky at night with searchlights. The beams crisscrossed and played against the clouds. The diffused illumination, similar to moonlight, aided truck drivers to negotiate treacherous roads. Because of the uneven topography of the mountains, the light helped to orient us as we moved between our emplacments on foot.

We finally moved into a shelled out farmhouse with foxholes dug into the floor. It started to snow and turned bitterly cold. That is when I got frostbite in my legs. They issued extra clothing. All supplies came to us at night on pack mules. They sent out a patrol one night to scout German positions. Upon returning, machine gun fire killed the patrol leader at one of our own outposts. There was an errant exchange of passwords. The next night I saw the body carried off the front draped over a pack mule.

We had a two-man foxhole about a hundred yards out in front of the farmhouse. It was manned only at night. One man slept while the other stood guard. I can never forget a nightmare I had in that foxhole. The Germans overran us and one of them was cutting my throat.

On New Years Eve of 1944 another division relieved us. When we got to our rest area we celebrated by firing our weapons wildly into the air until we ran out of ammunition. During this rest period they promoted me to Private First Class and awarded new replacements the Combat Infantry Badge. That meant I would receive PFC pay plus an additional ten dollars every month because of the badge.

It wasn't long before we were back on the front. This time we occupied three farm buildings perched on a mountain overlooking German positions tunneled into the side of another mountain about a thousand yards away. A barren slope leading up to the German emplacments were pockmarked with shell holes. A lone tree devoid of foliage stood in the middle of the slope. Intermittently, we raked the Germans with machine gun fire both night and day. With binoculars we watched the Germans during the day moving hurriedly in and out of their tunnels. During the night we occupied positions down the slope from the farm buildings. Every night we sent out two man patrols to make contact with the units on both flanks. I lead several of these patrols. Upon returning, my partner remarked how fast I walked. I made no bones about the fact that I was scared.

We set up a field kitchen because our daytime position was relatively safe from direct fire. We got water from a wellhead that was visible to the Germans during the day. Each night we sent

out a team to obtain the supply for the next day. Having hot meals in place of C rations or K rations boosted our morale.

On the night of March 18, 1945, Lt. Decker's platoon was sent on a mission from which we never returned. My birthday was the next day. Somehow, the Germans learned of our approach and ambushed us. One of our guys was killed and the rest taken prisoner. It all happened at the small village of Cavallina.

I was one of two scouts at the point of the patrol. We stopped moving forward when we heard rifle fire to our rear and a German hollering, "Hands up! Hands up!" A flare blinded my vision. After a few seconds the flare burned out and the other scout said, "Did you see that German up there?" I hadn't. Moments later Lt. Decker appeared and said, "We got to get to hell out of here!" I slung my M-1 rifle over my shoulder and Lt. Decker began leading the two of us up a sharp incline. Then the Germans appeared herding our guys before them with their arms raised. A German saw us escaping and fired a burst from a burp gun toward Lt. Decker. They continued to shout, "Hands up." I turned about, letting my rifle slide off my shoulder to the ground and raised my hands.

Another flare tripped close by as they marched us toward their command post. The light blinded and terrified me and I fell to the ground against the wall of a building. At the same time American artillery shells were bursting all around us. Evidently the American fire was intended to distract the Germans and allow some of us to escape. It didn't work.

Soon that flare burned out and the Germans brought us into their command post. The officers laughed about the success of the ambush. They told us they knew we were coming. With a big smile on his face, one officer announced, "You are Co. I." It was clear that they had correct intelligence.

However, not all the Germans seemed happy. I was toward the rear of the room where a German enlisted man sat nervously on some sand bags. He knew a little English and we exchanged information as best we could. It appeared he was only too conscious of the fact that they were losing the war. I told him that we had eaten peaches and cream for dinner the day before.

More than fifty years after the war, I discovered a book called, *Dogfaces Who Smiled Through Tears* by Homer R. Ankrum. It is a chronicle of the 34th Division during the North African and Italian campaigns. It narrates what happened at Company Headquarters the night I was captured. I quote from page 624:

"Lt. Sylvester Decker's good fortune ran out on March 18th when his patrol was ambushed, surrounded on all sides. The men via field phone, which they had carried, stringing wire behind them, were in contact with Co. I, 133rd Inf. Commander, Lt. John T. Gorman of Endicott, N. Y. The last words that came over the line, 'We are about to be taken prisoner,' then silence prevailed."

Fifty six years later I received another version of what took place that night from my Company Commander John Gorman. By this time, I had become computer illiterate and learned how to locate people on the internet. I entered both Lt. Gorman's and Lt. Decker's names into Sherlock on my Macintosh. It happened that a John Gorman appeared on my screen and he lived in Endicott, New York. Decker's name also appeared and the computer reported that he lived in Minnesota. I took the liberty to drop the postcard to John hoping for a response. A few days later I received a telephone call from him and we reminisced for some time. After leaving the army he had gone to school under the GI Bill and then worked for IBM for 35 years before retiring. During our conversation he verified that the Decker who lived in Minnesota was indeed the same

person who had been my platoon leader when we were captured. He gave me Sylvester's telephone number.

After John and I hung up, I called Sylvester. His wife Bernice answered the phone and told me that Sylvester was hard of hearing and would not be able to talk for very long. Nevertheless, I did speak with him briefly and learned that he was a lifetime member of the American Ex-prisoners of War, was 100 percent disabled and receiving a pension from the Veterans Administration.

Subsequently, I mailed Sylvester and John a copy of Chapter 3 of these memoirs and asked them for any recollections they had with which I might be familiar such as names, dates, and places relating to operations of our Company in northern Italy. Then on my birthday in 2001 I received a letter from Lt. Gorman with his narration of the events surrounding our capture on the eve of my birthday 56 years before. I quote what he wrote:

"One disaster happened to Company I in March of 1945. On the line west of Highway 65, constant patrols had been checking a canyon in no man's land. Orders came to move in and occupy that position. The platoon under Lieutenant Sylvester Decker received the mission. Combat smart, Decker had earned a battlefield promotion to second lieutenant. Very carefully he moved his 33-man platoon down the ditch that opened into the canyon. Laying a phone wire as they moved slowly, pausing every 10 minutes to whistle softly into the sound powered phone that they were OK, Decker finally entered a cave in the canyon. As he called Gorman on the phone saying they were in position, grenades began exploding. The Lieutenant was last heard telling one of his men to check outside the cave. Then the phone went dead.

The next day the platoon sergeant got back to the Company. He had started running when the Germans, who were dug in on the sides of the canyon, opened fire. He ran through the canyon to a road beyond and back that road to the position of another company in the Regiment. He was the only man to return from the platoon. The enemy had occupied the canyon at dusk and set a trap, knowing patrols were there each night.

Gorman, sensing Decker's situation, immediately had started another platoon over the high ground leading to the canyon. Moving carefully to avoid another trap, Lieutenant Francis Haggerty's platoon arrived above a quiet canyon. The enemy had left with their prisoners.

That summer, Gorman received a postcard from Decker. He survived prisoner of war camp in Germany, was freed by U.S. troops, and headed for home.

Gorman located Decker in Minnesota during 1986 with the help of Ex-POW Association. They had an emotional phone conversation discussing the platoon disaster, Decker's POW experience, and their lives since."

To return to my own story, the German officers questioned each of us asking where we were from and what we did before the war. I answered that I was a student. One of them said he thought so. When the excitement of the night had passed, they took us to a holding place in the mouth of a railroad tunnel. A body lay at the side of the entrance neatly wrapped in a blanket. I couldn't tell if it was dead or alive. They fed us potato stew that tasted very good.

The next day the Germans moved us further away from the front lines to a group of houses where the interrogation took place. A guard escorted each of us individually into an office where two German officers sat. They wanted to know more than my name, rank, and serial number. When they asked me questions about my organization, I reminded them that I could not answer because of the Geneva Convention. They changed the subject and asked me if I had seen any poison gas shells stored in any American ammunition depots. I answered that I wouldn't know if I had. They tried to refresh my memory and told me the color of our poison gas canisters. Still, I

knew nothing. Then they dismissed me saying they had other ways of getting the information they sought. It was a threat.

After interrogation they moved us to a schoolhouse, and as they moved us farther and farther from the front lines, food became scarcer. We all shared our feelings about our desires for food and a woman, comparing which passion was the most important to us at the moment. At the time, there was no doubt that I craved a ham sandwich far more than a romp in the hay with Betty Grable. Women and food were constant topics of discussion. Those who smoked also had a passion for cigarettes. One prisoner attempted to dry horse manure in the sunlight and roll his own cigarette with a scrap piece of paper.

Next, they moved to a small prison near a town the name of which I forgot. A high fence strung with barbed wire surrounded it. Guards stood in towers around the perimeter. It had a large open compound and one building where they locked us in at night. There was one water faucet in the compound for drinking. There was no latrine. We defecated and urinated into an open tub made from a fifty-gallon drum. It sat on the floor next to the entrance. Each morning and evening the Germans appointed two prisoners to empty the tub into a ditch near the perimeter of the prison. Shortly after arriving, two prisoners escaped taking a German guard with them. The head German guard vented his anger on us the next morning when they took a head count. It seemed without reason that he said to one prisoner, "I can kick the shit out of you."

While at the prison, P47s strafed the railroad station of the nearby town while the prisoners ran around the open compound cheering the pilots wildly. The German guards who sought cover thought we were crazy for exposing ourselves.

We left this prison in busses that used charcoal for fuel. It burned in a tank strapped on the rear. The driver stopped periodically to stoke the burning charcoal. Then the Germans transferred us to boxcars to take us into Germany. They stuffed forty-eight stinking, starving men into each boxcar. European railroads have narrower gage tracks than American railroads. Consequently, the boxcars are smaller. Lying down to sleep, no one could turn over without everyone in the boxcar doing the same. Our daily food ration was a piece of pumpernickel and a small piece of sausage. Water was scarce. Crapping in a box and pissing through the crack in the sliding door of the boxcar was not my idea of how to treat a guest of the German government. The train moved through the Brenner Pass into Bavaria. The discomfort of the journey was not enough to prevent me from admiring the beauty of the Alps that were visible through the small barbed wired windows of the boxcar.

Chicago Herald-American

★★ Thurs., May 31, 1945

Freed Chicago Gis Arrive at Sheridan

One hundred and four more Chicago area soldiers recently liberated from German prison camps were expected at Fort Sheridan today. They will be granted 60-day furloughs within a few hours of their arrival.

The men landed in New York in the largest convoy of returning American soldiers yet to arrive from the European war theater. They are:

BENDA, T. Sgt. Roy A., 1619 Morse av.
JEFFRIES, S. Sgt. Willard L., 5492
SCHUCHARDT, 2d Lt. Harold E., 1927 N. 8th st., Sheboygan, Wis.

NELSON, Pfc. Walter C., 2044 Superior st., Racine, Wis.

MARRA, Pfc. Joseph M., 3319 W. Polk street.
McINERNEY, Pfc. Thomas F., 6914 S. May st.
STONEBACK, Cpl. Henry E., New Glarus, Wis.
THOMPSON, Cpl. Richard D., 812 Marshall av., Mattoon, Ill.

Along the way an English prisoner escaped and the SS recaptured him. They returned him to our boxcar. He told us the SS officers said they would have killed him if he had been American.

When we arrived at Stalag VIIA we received Red Cross parcels. Being very hungry, I hurriedly ate dehydrated rice and beef before it had time to soften in water. That gave me a bellyache. Conditions were bad at the prison. Other prisoners said there was open

Homecoming - June 1945
Shirley Dorothy Wally Grant Christine Roy Jack Effie

tuberculosis in the Russian compound. I saw one Russian wrapping his feet in strips of burlap because he had no shoes. There was no room for us in any of the barracks so we slept in pup tents on the ground. Everyone had lice and fleas.

The morning arrived before V-E Day when the gates of the prison opened and an American tank from the 14th Armored Division was parked outside. Prisoners immediately began roaming the town of Moosburg and there was much mischief.

At this point I move forward to the year 2000 when I was a delegate to the national convention of the American Ex-Prisoners of War in Louisville, Kentucky. We had a speaker named Tom Gibbons who was president of an organization called the Eagles Power Foundation. The Foundation was a separate POW organization that promoted drug prevention for America's kids. Tom addressed the convention and described how he liberated Stalag VIIA. He said he was the commander of the lead tank of the 14th Armored Division that opened the gate. I clearly remember seeing that tank parked at the gate of the prison. Tom told us that General Patton had intercepted a message from Hitler to the SS troops in the area ordering them to go to Stalag VIIA and annihilate the eleven thousand Americans being held there at that time. The total population of Stalag VIIA was one hundred and ten thousand, much larger then I realized. Tom's unit was 80 miles away and Patton ordered it post haste to the prison before the SS were able to get there and execute Hitler's order. He said he arrived at the prison only hours before the SS.

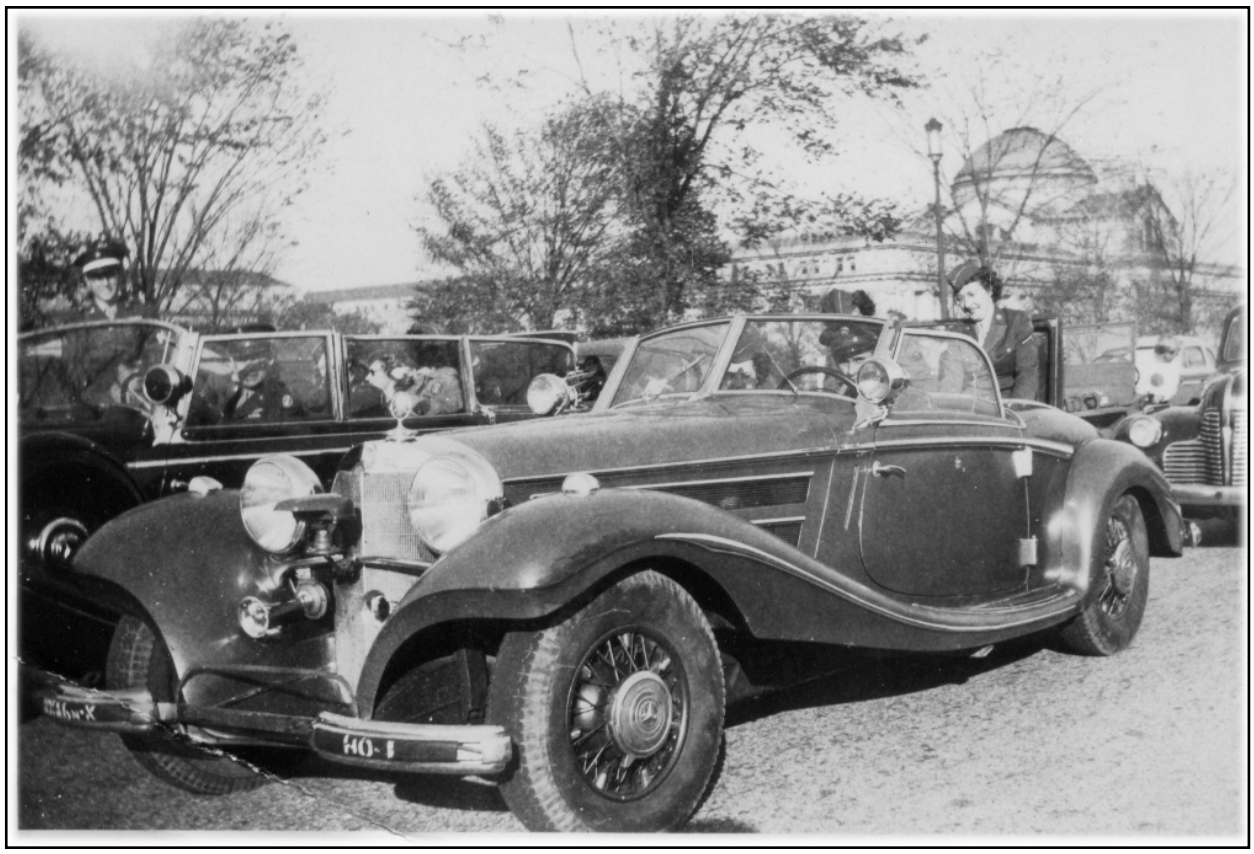
While speaking to Tom before his speech, he turned to me and said that I owed him a cup of coffee for his valorous deed. I replied, "How about a bottle of scotch?"

Before evacuation took place at Stalag VIIA I recall being deloused. The prisoners were told to form lines and pass by a medical attendant who operated a large syringe filled with a white

DDT powder. As we approached he squirted the powder into our hair and down the backs of our shirts. We opened the front of our trousers and more powder drenched our genitals. The night after the delousing was very uncomfortable for both the fleas and me.

Sometime later the Americans in the prison were evacuated to a nearby airstrip on the way to Camp Lucky Strike in France. At the airstrip I recall a ground collision between two C47s. It killed the pilots but the evacuation continued as though nothing had interrupted.

When we arrived at Camp Lucky Strike, everyone was issued new uniforms and given medical examinations. Our service records were brought up-to-date so that we could begin to get



Hitler's Roadster on the Mall
Washington D. C. - 1945

paid again. Then after a few days we boarded trucks that took us to the port in LeHarve. It was a pleasant sunny day as we rode through the city. Rubble was piled high on both sides of the streets. The bomb devastation of that harbor city was complete.

Ten or fifteen ex-prisoners rode the truck I was on, and we all felt exhilarated knowing that we were on our way back to the States. The ex-prisoner standing next to me had a big smile on his face and there was a sparkle in his eye as he reached into his shirt and pulled out a brassiere. His anticipation was evident as he waved the garment overhead in the wind. When I spoke to him he told me that he had been carrying it ever since he had left home.

Newspapers around the nation published the names of the returning ex-prisoners. That was how my family came to know that my Missing In Action status would not become Killed In Action. A few days later the family celebrated my homecoming with a party in Racine. They all gathered around the dining room table on Superior Street expecting me to relate what the fighting was like and how I got captured and liberated. I wanted to forget the whole god dam thing and didn't or couldn't say anything about what I had been through.

In spite of the heartache and worry that the war brought to Olaf and Christine, they remained patriotic. Olaf had erected a flagpole in the empty lot on the side of our house before he died, and the flag waved every day until after Christine moved away many years later.

Repatriation eventually led to reassignment. First they sent me to Miami Beach for more rest and rehabilitation. There they promoted me to Corporal and assigned me to the 300th Military Police Company in Washington D. C. where I patrolled the streets, the Greyhound Bus station and the railroad station called Union Station. I ticketed many soldiers and officers for being out of uniform in the nation's capitol. I drove a Jeep. They dispatched my partner and me to bars, restaurants and nightclubs to rescue or arrest rowdy servicemen. Sometimes the metropolitan police arrested servicemen. Then we drove and brought them to our own cellblock. One night they sent us to get a man from the metropolitan police. The metropolitan police suspected he was a serviceman. On the way back to the cellblock, we asked the man why they arrested him. He told us he caught another man cheating in a poker game. Then he said, "I didn't want to hurt him. I just wanted to kill him."

Major McDermott was our commanding officer. He had a passion for pursuing homosexual servicemen for prosecution. He diverted the AWOL chasers in the Company to seek out the homosexuals. This incensed the AWOL chasers who were policemen in civilian life. What irritated them the most, however, was

Cpl. Nelson at 300th MP barracks
3rd and Independence Avenues Washington

Ex-Prisoner of War Nelson - 1999

that others in the Company referred to them as the cocksucker squad.

Citations & Awards

Combat Infantry Badge

34th Infantry Division Insignia

Bronze Star

Military District of Washington Insignia

Good Conduct

European Theater

Honorable Service Lapel Button

American Theater

Victory Medal

Prisoner of War Medal

Expert Machine Gun

Rifle Sharpshooter

Sergeant Cervin had a poor reputation among the men. He gave a parking ticket to the driver of one of our own vehicles. The driver double-parked in front of a restaurant while picking up hamburgers for the men back at the barracks. It also happened that Sergeant Cervin ordered someone to use my jeep to take him to the cellblock a half-mile away. When I learned of the incident it made me angry. The Army held me personally responsible for the safety of the vehicle assigned to me. The next day I called Sergeant Cervin aside in one corner of the mess hall and asked him to refrain from the practice. He walked away saying, "Go see the dispatcher!" Before he moved more than a few steps I shouted so everyone in the mess hall could hear, "The next time you fuck around with my jeep I'll kick the shit out of you." Word spread fast. Thereafter, I felt increased warmth from everyone in the Company. As time went, on even Sergeant Cervin warmed up to me and engaged me in friendly conversation in the recreation room.

On pages 44-45 are the only photographs I have to remind me of my duty when I was assigned to the Military Police in Washington D. C. in 1945.

Page 47 has a photograph of the citations and awards received during my military career.

V-J Day took place while I was in Washington. The event accelerated a reduction in force in all the armed services. All the military services began downsizing. A complicated point system was used to determine who was eligible for release. By December 1945 I had accumulated enough points to qualify for discharge. They discharged me at Ft. Myers, Virginia and I took the first train available to return home to Racine.

Over fifty years later I met, Joe Pedersen, another Ex-POW, while playing golf in Titusville, Florida. We exchanged war stories and he invited me to join his Chapter of the American Ex-Prisoners of War. The Chapter Joe was in met monthly at the Veterans Center on Merritt Island. I resisted the invitation for a long time. Joe continued to invite me and said I might get some money out of it. It seemed far too improbable.

Eventually I agreed to give an entertaining speech to Joe's Chapter about my book, *Home On The Range*. As a result, I joined the American Ex-Prisoners of War and about three years later became a National Director.

Then following the advice of Chapter leaders I filed a claim with the Veterans Administration. VA doctors examined me. They told me about physical and mental health problems I have attributed to my incarceration. I have heart disease and frostbite in both legs. I also have suppressed emotions that will never go away. Two years after filing my claim, the VA granted me a pension. The photograph on page 43 was taken about that time and it reveals my happiness with my improved financial status. Receiving this pension has awakened a sense of gratitude for the privilege of having been born and raised in this country.

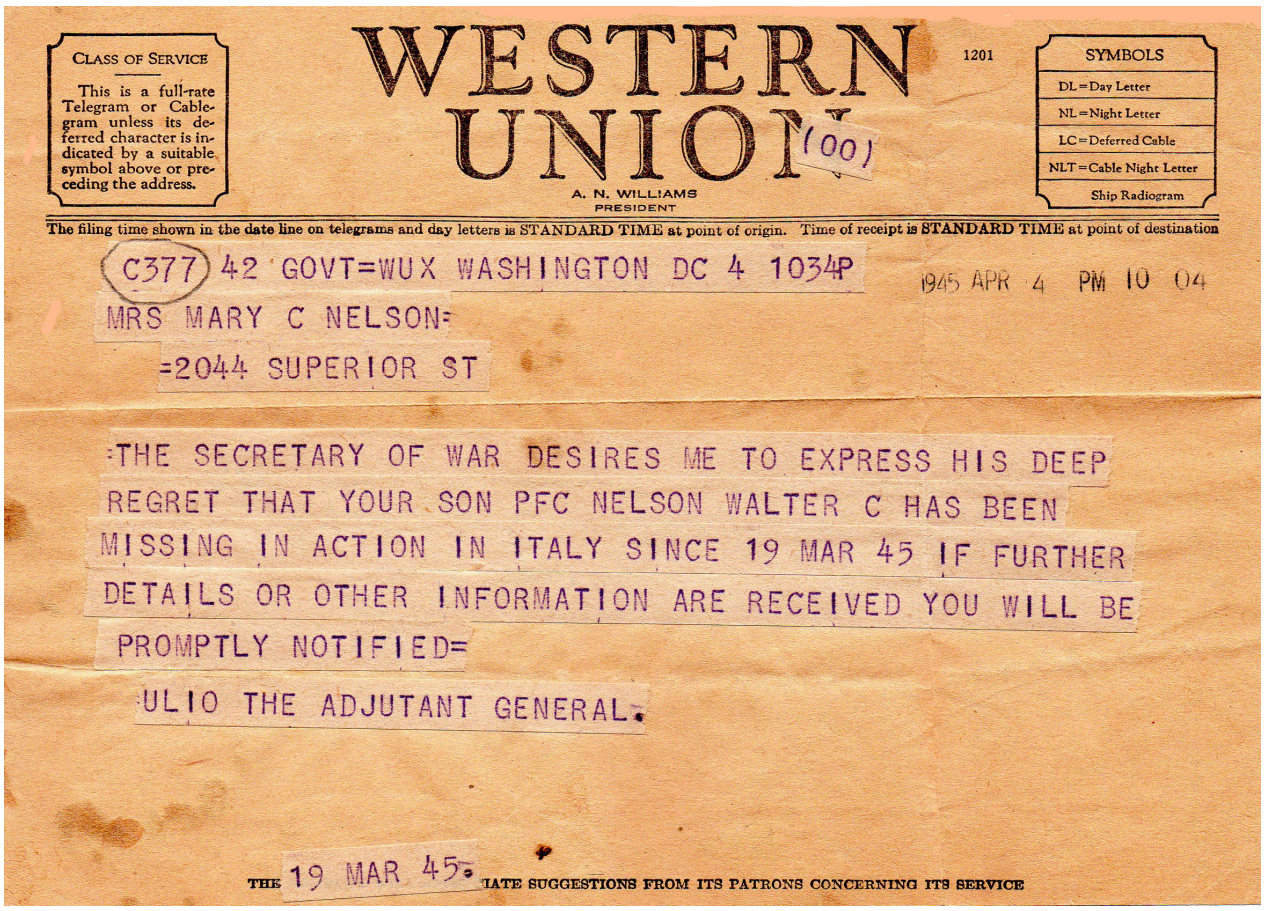
I rarely spoke of my war experiences until I joined the American Ex-Prisoners of War. Now I am learning to share my suppressed emotions with others. I write and I look for opportunities to speak to youth groups and civic organizations to promote patriotism. When I do, it always awakens the pain I feel due to man's inhumanity to man. Sometimes it causes me to weep spontaneously.

I made a movie called Expectations, a personal history of World War II, and showed in to the residents of VOTG on Memorial Day, May 26, 2008.

The reader can find in Chapter 8 some of the things I wrote, movies I have made or participated in, and speeches I delivered after joining the American Ex-Prisoners of War.

About Liberation of Stalag VIIA
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalag_VII-A

Stalag VII A was liberated on 29 April 1945 by Combat Command A of the 14th Armored Division after a pitched battle with a large defending force of 5,000-7,000 German troops. Foremost among the defending units was the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division supported by a few remaining self-propelled guns and 88 mm antitank guns. Combat Command A had a total strength of 1,750 officers and men, including only a single company of armored infantrymen. The American force learned of the existence of the camp, and its approximate location only a few hours before the attack. Because so many Allied POWs were in the area, the U.S. artillery, a major factor in any attack, was ordered not to fire, and remained silent during the attack. POWs inside the wire heard the Germans open fire on the American liberators as they crossed a bridge leading into Moosburg. The American response was instantaneous. Outnumbered, but not outgunned, the men of the combat command waded into the SS troops with a ferocity and volume of weapons fire that stunned even the most veteran SS officers. Resistance was eliminated, and the camp liberated. Among the 130,000 Allied POWs liberated were 30,000 American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and even a few Marines. It was the largest single liberation of American POWs in the history of the US military. Following the war, the U.S. Army officially designated the 14th Armored Division as the "LIBERATORS" for liberating so many American and Allied POWs from German camps.



CLASS OF SERVICE
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WESTERN UNION

1201

SYMBOLS
DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

(001)

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

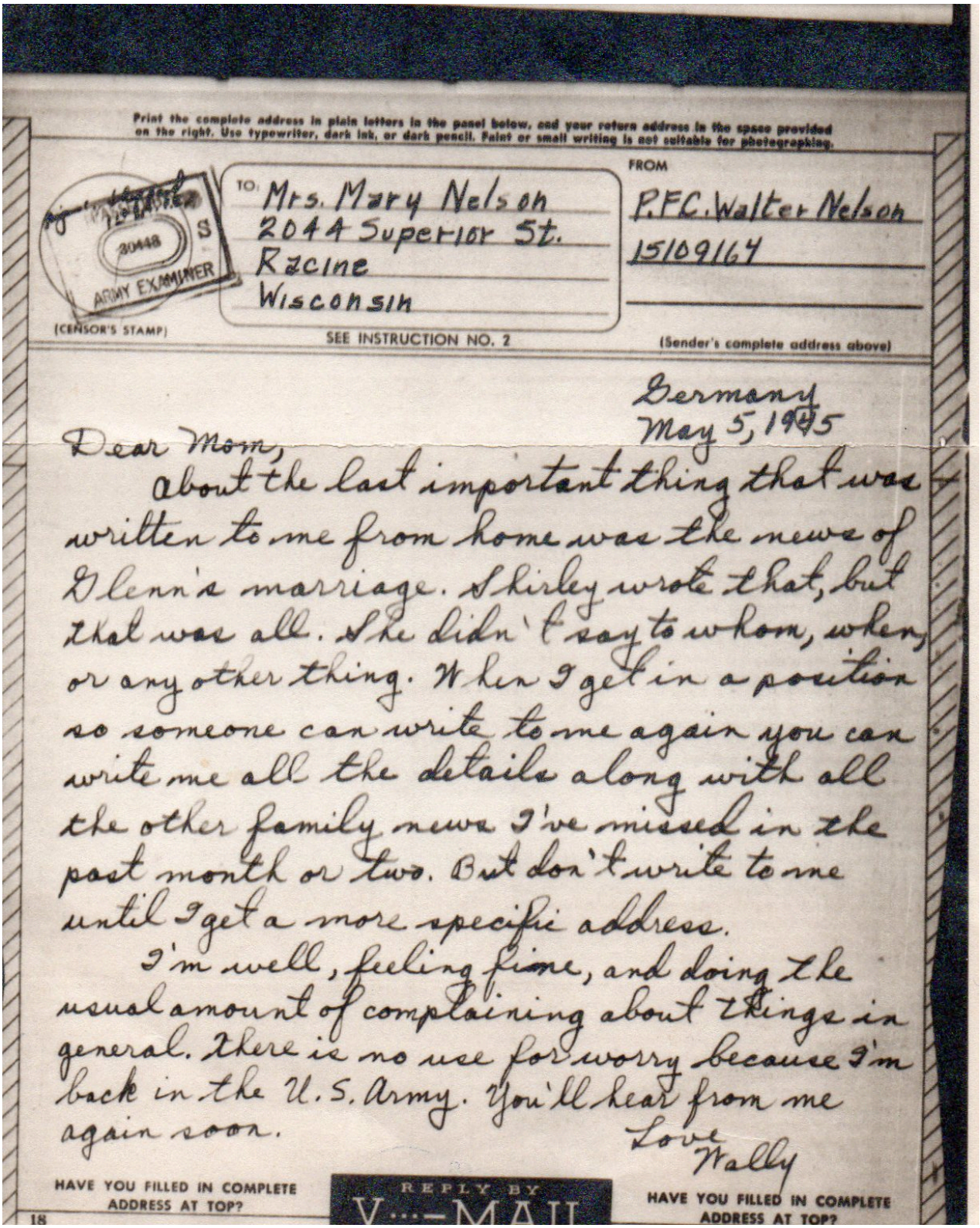
The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

C377 42 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC 4 1034P 1945 APR 4 PM 10 04

MRS MARY C NELSON=
=2044 SUPERIOR ST

=THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON PFC NELSON WALTER C HAS BEEN MISSING IN ACTION IN ITALY SINCE 19 MAR 45 IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED=
=ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

THE 19 MAR 45= IATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE



Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

(CENSOR'S STAMP)

TO: Mrs. Mary Nelson
2044 Superior St.
Racine
Wisconsin

SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

FROM
P.F.C. Walter Nelson
15109164

(Sender's complete address above)

Germany
May 5, 1945

Dear Mom,

About the last important thing that was written to me from home was the news of Glenn's marriage. Shirley wrote that, but that was all. She didn't say to whom, when, or any other thing. When I get in a position so someone can write to me again you can write me all the details along with all the other family news I've missed in the past month or two. But don't write to me until I get a more specific address.

I'm well, feeling fine, and doing the usual amount of complaining about things in general. There is no use for worry because I'm back in the U.S. Army. You'll hear from me again soon.

Love
Wally

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

REPLY BY V...—MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

18

PC

WAR DEPARTMENT
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO:

AG 201 Nelson, Walter C.
PC-N MT0087

6 April 1945

Mrs. Mary C. Nelson
2044 Superior Street
Racine, Wisconsin

Dear Mrs. Nelson:

This letter is to confirm my recent telegram in which you were regretfully informed that your son, Private First Class Walter C. Nelson, 15,109,164, has been reported missing in action in Italy since 19 March 1945.

I realize the distress caused by failure to receive more information or details; therefore, I wish to assure you that in the event additional information is received at any time, it will be transmitted to you without delay. If no information is received in the meantime, I will communicate with you again three months from the date of this letter.

Inquiries relative to allowances, effects and allotments should be addressed to the agencies indicated in the inclosed Bulletin of Information.

Permit me to extend to you my heartfelt sympathy during this period of uncertainty.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. ULIO
Major General
The Adjutant General.

1 Inclosure
Bulletin of Information